

AINSLIE'S

THE MAGAZINE OF ENTERTAINMENT

OCT. 1919
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*The
Seventh Stair
by
Fanny Boyd*



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AINSLIE'S

The Magazine That Entertains

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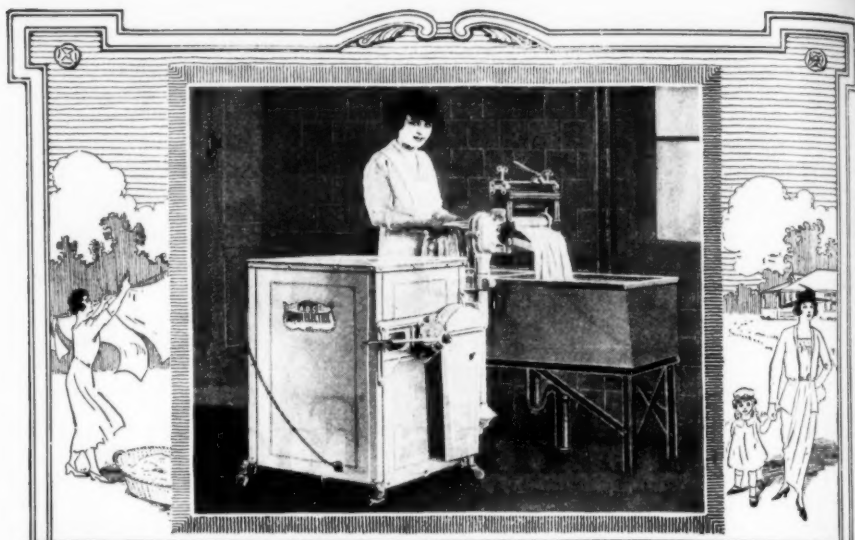


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AINSLIE'S

VOL. XLIV.

OCTOBER, 1919.

No. 3.



The Seventh Stair

By Nancy Boyd

Author of "Young Love," "The Door,"
"The Dark Horse," etc.

CHAPTER I.

OPERATOR—operator— No, *Stuyvesant* 4537! Hello! Where's that taxi you were going to send down here half an hour ago? What's that? Oh, I beg your pardon. Operator— No, *don't* ring 'em again—you're ringing the wrong number! I want *Stuyvesant* 4537. Well, why didn't you *tell* me the line was busy? Try *Columbus*— Hello! Are you there? Operator! Oh, suffering cats!"

David Morley agitated the receiver hook furiously. He ran a handsome hand through his hair. Then he laid his dead cigarette on the edge of the table, pulled out his watch, and cursed whimperingly.

He rose, went to the street door, and looked out. No taxi in sight. Only a Borden's milk team, full of shaking bottles, and a man selling mint and red geraniums from a wagon. The day was cold for near June in New York. The sky was overcast and unfriendly; dry gusts of wind pushed soiled newspapers along the street and blew dirt into his face as he stood there.

He closed the door and went back to the telephone.

"Columbus 5000. No, I didn't. Ring 'em again—ring 'em— Hold

on a minute. I guess he's here. All right, thank you. Never mind."

He slammed up the receiver, caught up his bag and brief case, and rushed into the hall. A taxi was chugging in front of the house. He heard some one running up the steps. Grabbing his hat from the hall table and his stick from the umbrella stand, he strode to the door.

But he did not open it.

He stood with hand outstretched while a key turned sharply in the lock.

David Morley was a bachelor and lived quite alone.

He was a writer and a thinker, a man who did not wish to be interrupted in his work. He had no friend with whom he was on terms of sufficient intimacy so that the sound of some one else entering his apartment with a latchkey would not astonish him. So far as he knew, no one but himself had a key to his house.

He stepped back into the shadow and waited.

A woman he had never seen before stepped swiftly into the hall, closed the door behind her, and rushed toward the stairway. Morley received a swift general impression of a tall, slim figure topped by a great *chignon* of light hair and encased in very smart dark clothes. Apparently coming in suddenly as she

had done from the daylight, she had passed him in the half darkness without seeing him.

At the foot of the stairs, however, she paused and shot a startled glance back over her shoulder. He caught a glimpse of a white face, out of which two wide gray eyes blazed forth, bitter and accusing. Then she turned and went rapidly up the stairs, calling down to him as she went, in a low, lovely voice expressive of no trouble beyond a slight irritation:

"Pay my taxi, will you, dear? I find I haven't a cent of change. Stupid of me," she added with a little laugh of deprecation, as she went out of sight around the landing.

He heard her running up the attic stairway.

Suddenly David Morley turned, yanked open the street door, and dashed out.

The door slammed to behind him.

CHAPTER II.

Jane Pierce stood for some moments on the seventh step of the attic stairs, listening for sounds from below. She heard the door slam and the sound of a taxi driving off. A moment later, a second automobile, driven furiously, was heard to pass the house and continue up the street.

"There he is," she said.

Suddenly she caught at the bannister and sat down, weakly, but noiselessly, still listening, with all her senses strained, for some warning of danger.

The house was silent as a house asleep.

She came cautiously down to the landing and listened there. Almost immediately a sound from what might be the library sent her scrambling back halfway up the stairs. She waited, panting. The sound she had heard was followed by a succession of very soft

sounds, as of sparks snapping in a grate.

"Nothing but a falling log," she said to herself.

A silence ensued so deep and long drawn out that the ringing of the telephone came to her ear like the report of a pistol. The instrument rang monotonously for some time, and finally ceased, nobody having answered it.

"Empty!" she said aloud. "Not a soul here."

After a moment, she went boldly down into the lower hall, letting her feet fall heavily on the stairs. Going straight to the front door, she laid one hand upon the knob and with the other turned back the screw of the spring lock just above it. Having done this, however, she paused.

"*Prends garde, chère amie,*" she said to herself and, running swiftly back to the upper floor, entered the hall bedroom, of which the door stood open, and, gently raising the window, looked down into the quiet street, her face carefully hidden by the curtains.

Not only the house she was in, but the entire street, seemed deserted. Somewhere in the neighborhood, a hurdy-gurdy began to play.

She listened for a moment.

"Still playing that old Sicilian tune," she said. "Wonder if he still wears the same yellow shirt."

The house directly across the way had lately been remodeled and turned into studio apartments. In the window corresponding to the one from which she was looking, cerise and orange curtains of what seemed to be cheesecloth were being blown out and sucked in again by the wind. On the stoop below, on either side of the doorway, stood a bucket painted in stripes of black and green, in which were standing enormous, round artificial blossoms of purple, blue, and red. As she looked, a young woman with dark hair, cropped just below her ears, wearing black cor-

duroy trousers and a blue linen smock, opened the door and came out on the step. She stood looking up and down; then, tossing back her hair, she came running across the street, flicking away her cigarette as she ran.

Jane was so interested in watching her that she had scarcely time to draw back from the window as the doorbell rang and the woman looked up.

"My Lord!" said Jane wearily. "I wonder what she wants."

Removing her hat, she ran her fingers through her flattened hair and leaned her head against the wall, closing her eyes.

The bell rang again. Then came a whistled bird call, clear and confident, beneath the window.

Jane repeated the call, too softly to be overheard, and chuckled a little.

"Sorry, Trousers," she apostrophized the now invisible girl who was ringing.

"Lothario has just stepped out for a minute. Can give no information as to his whereabouts," she added, "which distresses me as much as it does you."

Jane waited until she heard the door close across the street. Then she pulled down the window and went out into the hall, bent upon gathering whatever of evidence the house might contain as to the sudden and complete disappearance of her extraordinary host.

She opened the door of the first room on her left, a large bedroom, evidently designed for guests, furnished with twin beds, chaise longue, a small writing desk and a low dressing table, each with a chair before it, and a round reading stand between the beds; all these of some light, smooth wood, upholstered in a pleasant cretonne featuring blue flamingoes on a lemon ground.

"This will do nicely," said Jane Pierce and, entering the room, she took her fountain pen from her hand bag and placed it on the desk beside two yellow quills. Then she installed her hat upon the shelf in the closet.

After which, pleased with her fancy, she reached again into her bag and, going to the bathroom at the end of the hall, hung up her Prophylactic medium by the side of a Prophylactic hard.

"Fie, sir, fie!" she said disapprovingly. "You forgot yours! And I'll wager you had no more on your mind when you went away than I had when I cleared out."

She looked longingly at the spacious white tub over which hung the shower sheet, its folds still clinging together damply. Then, shaking her head, she went resolutely back to her search.

On entering the other sleeping room, she stood still for a moment with an exclamation of delight.

She seemed to have stepped out of her world into the luxurious East. The room showed interesting gleanings from different countries, but the style of art seemed to be for the most part Chinese and Japanese.

The larger pieces of furniture were lacquered in Chinese red and set with long panels of intricately carved sandalwood, giving the room a most mysterious and pleasing Old World atmosphere. She took a few steps forward in order to examine things more closely—little transparent teacups; queer pictures on silk and painted under glass, with many little hipped bridges and funny men carrying parasols; and miniature temples and pagodas—one an exquisitely carved Chinese joss house, made out of soapstone, mounting in its many stories from a heavy base to a final point, standing at least two feet from the floor and supporting on its peak a large, strange bird.

There was a large cabinet containing the choicest things. Halfway across the floor, nearly concealing the huge balcony bed, was the tallest screen Jane had ever seen. It was of black lacquer and seemed to have nearly a dozen sections. In one corner was a teakwood

chest whose cover, thrown back, revealed many brightly colored garments. Jane, on her knees before it, lifted from their places thin Japanese kimonos and their heavily decorated overcoats, with enormous obis hanging from them, and gorgeous Chinese priest robes, which Jane loved most of all. Selecting one of these, she placed it over the edge of the bed and ran through to the room beyond. On returning, she placed her fountain pen on the cabinet and her hat over a hawthorn jar; then, suddenly remembering her quest, she ran past the jingling devil chasers, out into the hall, and down the stairs.

Beyond giving rise to the notion that the gentleman of the house might have gone forth on a pilgrimage to the Orient, the second floor had furnished no clue as to the reason of his failing to return.

The first floor, however, proved not so fruitless. Taking in the front room at a glance, which revealed nothing of interest to her beyond a beautiful piano, Jane went immediately through into the study, attracted by the glow of the dying fire.

Entering this room, she caught sight at once of a Western Union envelope on the floor.

The telegram was on the desk. It was from Chicago, addressed to David Morley, and read as follows:

Daye I need you come at once Ethel

Jane stood for a moment motionless, the yellow paper hanging from her hand.

"Safe for three days at least!" she breathed. Then, quite without warning, she sobbed once, and as if this sound had been the signal for the storming of her pitiful defense by a host of ambushed emotions, she began to shake from head to foot and, groping her way toward the fire, threw herself face down on the rug before it, convulsed with an agony of tears.

CHAPTER III.

"Pennsylvania Station and drive like blazes! Don't turn—go up Hudson Street—and don't get arrested!"

When David Morley rushed down the steps of his house into the taxicab which Providence had so kindly left at his disposal, his only thought for the moment was of catching his train. Ethel had got into trouble again in Chicago with her confounded political agitation and needed him as badly as she said, he guessed.

Almost immediately, however, he recalled that he was leaving his conservative lares and penates to the dubiously tender care of a strange woman who, the moment before, had broken into his dwelling.

But no, she had let herself in with a key. Whose key? He felt in his pocket for his own. No, he had not dropped it on the sidewalk in front of the house.

Just then he happened to look at the meter.

"Seven-forty! My hat!" he ejaculated. "Where under the sun did she start from?"

His first conjecture as to her unexpected visit had been that she had mistaken his house for her own. This was, evidently, what she had wished him to believe. "Pay my taxi, dear, will you?" He grinned.

"With pleasure, madam," said he. "Twice, if you will tell me where you started from."

"Dear!" For whom had she mistaken him? But that was foolishness. You don't let yourself into your neighbor's house with your own key any more than you unlock your trunk with a key borrowed from somebody else. It just doesn't fit. Besides, could any one possibly mistake him for a husband. Certainly *not*! The young lady had addressed him with purpose of deceiving him.

Granted that the person possessed a key to his house, or the skill to pick the lock with a hairpin—the possibility of which feat he much doubted, even though he had heard of its being done—granted, in short, that she possessed the means of entrance to his abode, what on earth had inspired her with the impulse so to enter?

Murder? Scarcely. Theft? This very possibly. He grinned again, a somewhat rueful grin; there were several very nice things in his house. Well, it couldn't be helped. He simply had to go to Chicago. Then the memory of her haste, her almost panic, came to him. Flight? Ah! He looked through the window in the back of the car, and for the first time became aware that he was being followed. A taxi somewhat larger and heavier than the one he was in, and of an older model, was careering up Hudson Street in hot pursuit. There was no mistake about it.

"Good God!" cried David Morley suddenly. "If they catch up with me and try to stop this bus, I miss my train!"

He rapped sharply with his stick on the window behind the driver.

"Can you speed her up a little?" he shouted. "I'll take any chances you will."

The car reared like whipped-up horses and went lurching through the traffic, for all the world as if the driver knew they were being chased.

At the station, Morley leaped out, threw his luggage to a porter, and turned to the cabby.

"Did any one ever do you a good turn?" he asked. "Well, wait a minute." He hastily counted out some bills from his pocketbook, the driver watching him as he did so. "Now, listen." He thrust the bills into the man's hand. "No one has been in this cab but me since you can remember. D'ye understand? And turn back that indicator quick!"

"I git ye, sir. The lady. Thank ye, sir."

David turned and raced after the porter, who was beckoning him to hurry.

"Ch'cago train, sah? Got yuh ticket? No time, suh. Come right along. Ah'll get yuh through."

Dicky Webb, whose good fortune it had been to drive Mr. Morley to the station, took from his breast pocket a large cigar and was carefully cutting the end off with a penknife when the other cab drove up and stopped behind him.

A heavily built man, well dressed in light clothes and very red in the face, chewing an unlighted cigar, jumped out and, without ceremony, pulled open the door of Dicky's machine and peered within.

"Where to, sir?" said Dicky politely, reaching around and pushing the door against the gentleman's back. "Oh, I beg your pardon, sir. I t'ought youse was in a hurry."

"Where is she?"

"Where's who, sir? Wa'n't no lady with him."

"Oh, yes, there was! What are you talking about?"

"My fare, sir. Wa'n't no lady with him," Dicky explained tolerantly. "He was alone."

"See here!" The large, angry gentleman came straight up to Dicky and shook a fat fist under his nose. "Don't try any funny business with me! You know where she is all right!"

"Beg pardon, sir?" said Dicky with suspicious sweetness, his right shoulder lifting under his coat.

The gentleman took a step back, and his manner softened. He drew some bills from his pocket.

"Let's get down to business," he said, and turned to his own driver. "You sure this is the right one?"

"Same cab, sir. I took the number."

"All right. Now see here." He turned back to Dick. "How much do you want to tell me where you picked the lady up, where you dropped her, and all you know about that man?" He jerked his thumb in the direction of the station.

Dicky got out, cranked his engine, and climbed back into the car.

"There ain't been no lady in this here barouche since Adam got into long pants!" said he. "As for the gentleman I had, I picked him up at the Harvard Club, and his baggage is checked to Tombstone, Arizona. Funny thing about that place—they say there's a newspaper there called the *Tombstone Epitaph*. Wouldn't that get your mother-in-law——" Dicky lighted his cigar and prepared to drive off. "That's all I know, sir, and you're welcome to it," he added cordially, "and I'd have told you the same thing if you'd given me forty dollars."

CHAPTER IV.

The mysterious events leading up to Jane Pierce's invasion of Morley's house had been as follows:

At two o'clock that afternoon, Jane had come back from a delicatessen's to her room in Patchin Place, bearing with her ten cents' worth of butter, two rolls, a pint of milk, and two slices of ham bologna.

She lighted the gas in her one-burner cooking attachment and, putting some butter into the top of a discarded coffee tin, fried the meat luxuriously. Then, turning out the gas and pouring some of the milk into a corrugated jelly tumbler which she took from over the sink, she sat down on the bare springs of the bed to eat her luncheon.

The two blankets on and under which she had slept the previous night were still on the floor, which, being more level than the bed, had proved also to

be more comfortable. So far as Jane knew, the bed had never had a mattress. It had been left there by a former occupant and, together with a mangy armchair and a rug which had been turned wrong side up for some reason Jane had never cared to investigate, a tiny, rusty stove which would grow more and more useless as the season advanced, a jelly tumbler, two delicate paint-stiffened brushes, and a whisky bottle daubed orange, helped to fit out a room which was let nominally "Unfurnished."

Jane had rented this room about a week before from a somewhat fierce-looking woman with a great deal of iron-gray hair and a thick Scotch voice, who, at the time of the transaction, had been intoxicated to the point of great pedal insecurity.

She had refused at first even to show Jane her one vacant apartment, accusing her of being the sly puss who, eight months before, had demanded admittance to the old lady's castle while smoking a cigarette on the step, and had righteously been denied entrance into the halls of a respectable woman who had a respectable son in Tallahassee, Florida.

When assured that Jane had never smoked a cigarette on any respectable woman's steps with a respectable son in Tallahassee, Florida, the landlady had reconsidered the matter, even to the point of offering Jane a drink.

On being assured that she had just had a drink, Mrs. McPherson had been just about to take her on as a tenant when the young man then occupying the room adjacent to the one for which Jane was an applicant had come down the stairs behind the old woman and sought exit through the door past her person. Just then a prodigious thought had occurred to Mrs. McPherson and she had barred the way with a stout, naked forearm.

"So this is it!" she had screamed.

"You are tryin' to get together! Weel, ye'll hae na place in my hoose. Dinna think I forget the morn ye left the hoose together, nor the twa voices chatterin' the night long! I ken ye weel, ye dirty blonde!"

"What's that you say, my Scotch bluebell?" the young man had said, leaning heavily on the old lady's arm until he had broken her hold and then coming out into the courtyard. He was a pale young man with long black hair, wearing a faded shooting jacket and heavy moccasins. Now, with his hand on his heart, he had bowed very low to Jane and spoken in a musical voice, with an agreeable, though unmistakable foreign accent.

"My apologies, madam, and protestations of my despair that, through any past indiscretions of my own, you should have been subjected to insult from this illiterate bacchante." With this he had turned to his landlady. "Mrs. McPherson, my Highland thistle, let me assure you of one thing: this young lady has never graced my humble—my, oh, so humble!—my more than humble—my dusty, stifling quarters with her presence. Had she so done, I should not now be wasting words on a respectable mother of a respectable son in Tallahassee, Florida, but, bathed in living light, astride of Pegasus, should 'strike the stars with my exalted head.'" He had bowed to Jane, even lower than before, and gone out toward Tenth Street.

At the corner he had turned back to say:

"I forgot to tell you that I am leaving my room this afternoon, and the young lady can have both rooms."

"And bad luck gang with ye," the old woman had shrieked after him, "and yer foul, ill-soundin' instrument!"

Jane had paid twelve dollars, insuring to herself lodging for a month.

On the afternoon on which our story opens, Jane Pierce, as we have already

learned, sat on the bare springs of her bed in Patchin Place eating bologna.

Having finished her luncheon, she washed some handkerchiefs, which she spread to dry on the windowpanes, previously dusted by a handkerchief from her pocket, and a pair of stockings, which she hung on a newspaper over the back of the chair.

She was drying her hands when the housekeeper's bell rang, and, knowing that Mrs. McPherson had been known to lock herself out and, returning, ring her own bell half the afternoon, Jane ran to the window of the vacant room which opened into her own and looked down upon the doorstep.

It was not Mrs. McPherson, but a man—a large man dressed in light—Jane drew back into the room, trembling.

"Oh, no!" she whispered. "Oh, no!" Then suddenly she threw back her head and clenched her fists.

Going swiftly back to her own room, she locked the door leading into it from the hall. The rickety door leading into the room she had just left was ostensibly fastened by a hasp, the screw eye of which had been turned so often in the wood of the door, however, that the slightest pressure would force it from its place.

The doorbell rang the second time, this time more insistently. Jane heard Mrs. McPherson get up from her rocker in the room below and move heavily toward the hall. Frantically unlocking her door, Jane ran into the hall and leaned over the bannister.

"It is for me, Mrs. McPherson. I looked out of the window. I'm going right down."

Returning to her room, she grabbed up her hat, her hand bag, and the two handkerchiefs, still damp, from the window. Then, after a hurried glance around, she went out, locked the door, and ran down the stairs.

Before she reached the foot, the

doorbell rang again. Swinging herself around sharply by the newel post, she rushed through the lower hall to the rear door and out, closing the door softly behind her, into a charming little stone courtyard adorned by pots of flowers and entirely inclosed by the backs of houses.

Through the rear door of one of these houses, which was always left unlocked—as was the rear door of the house she had just left—and through the hall she stole, letting herself out by the front door into Mulligan Place.

A moment later, she saw a taxi coming down Sixth Avenue and hailed it instinctively, having no idea what direction she should give the driver—none other than Dicky Webb, on his way back to the National Lunch, for his small steak with onions!

"Drive through the park." This was the only thing she could think of. She had heard that it was impossible to get into a hotel without luggage, she was not a member of any club, and she had no friends in town. She drove through the park for over an hour.

After a while, the driver turned out of his own accord into Columbus Circle and, reaching back, opened the door.

"Where to, miss?"

Jane was in no mood to rebuke him and send him sternly back into the park. Perhaps he didn't like the park. It was all the same to her where she went.

"Oh—down the Avenue," she said.

Through the window she watched the well-dressed crowd surging up and down, the gay-colored hats, the carefully tended faces, the tiny dogs, the beautiful high-heeled shoes; men and women walking together, the man swinging his stick and taking long, leisurely steps, the woman looking up into his face and laughing, hurrying along at his side. Every one was so pretty and clean, even those who were too much painted; everybody in the world had a nice, big bathtub and plenty of hot

water, saving only one Jane Pierce, Patchin Place. She opened her bag, took out her powder puff and lip stick, freshened up her face, and tucked some wisps of hair up under her hat.

In the act of returning the articles to her bag, Jane paused and stiffened. Then she began a calm and systematic search of its contents: two unironed handkerchiefs, three small wire hair-pins, one safety pin, one powder puff, one stick of lip rouge, one small pocket comb in its case, one toothbrush, one fountain pen, several cards, letters, and slips of paper, two latchkeys, one smaller key, a dollar bill, and one dollar and sixty-eight cents in change. That was all. Her purse was not there. She remembered that she had left it in the pocket of her raincoat, which was now hanging on a nail in her room in Patchin Place.

She looked at the meter; as she looked, it went up a dime. She looked back into her bag. Two dollars and sixty-eight cents! What *could* she do? If she could only go in somewhere and tell him to wait, and send him the money later. She took a card from her bag and with her fountain pen wrote down the number of the cab, together with a description of Dicky Webb—"Broad shoulders, red hair, large, misshapen ear." She picked up a handful of change and regarded it. With it, one of the latchkeys lay in her hand; it was not the key to Patchin Place.

Suddenly Jane opened the door of the taxi and gave a number to the driver.

As she drew in her head, she looked full into the eyes of Benton Wood, the man she wished least of all men in the world to see, the man who had sought her at Patchin Place and from whom she had fled. He was just coming up from the café of the Brevoort Hotel, directly across from her. She looked back through the window and saw him beckoning to a taxi, which did not stop. Not waiting to see him succeed in get-

ting the next, she opened the door and called to the driver:

"Driver, please make it as quickly as you can. I am being followed!"

It struck her immediately that this was a stupid thing to say, but she could not think of anything that would have been better. Certainly to have said merely, "I am in a hurry!" after having spent half the afternoon dawdling about in the park, would have amused even a taxi driver, grown phlegmatic through seeing so many funny things.

As she closed the door, the taxi immediately gained speed. On reaching Washington Square, it wheeled sharply to the right, throwing her against the other side of the car. She lay huddled there until a turn to the left sent her back again. The driver seemed willing to do all he could to make time.

Below the park on MacDougal Street, Dicky Webb was forced to slow down. The groups of Italian children playing games in the street had no regard for traffic. Dicky honked his horn continually as he went along, and sometimes even shouted at them as the wheels came too close.

Jane for a moment became stricken with fear. It seemed that they were scarcely moving. At that rate, they soon would be overtaken. She turned and looked boldly through the rear window. Her pursuer was less than a block away.

She realized with horror that the progress of her own car was making clear a passage for the other. She groaned, twisting her hands.

Suddenly she sat up very straight, reached into her bag, and flung open the door of the taxicab.

"*Ecco! Ragazzi! Bambini!*" she called, summoning to her aid about all the Italian she knew, together with a bright smile and an inviting gesture of the arm. A shower of small coins, flung from her hand, flashed in the air behind her. Almost before they hit the

ground, they were pounced upon by scores of children who, flocking like chickens at the sound of a spoon on a pan, squabbling and yelling, completely filled the street.

Three times she did this and, by the time her taxi swung around the corner into Charlton Street, broad and empty, incredibly quiet, for three blocks in her wake not a child was left shooting craps, playing marbles, jumping rope, or tending fires in the gutter. She reached David Morley's house many minutes ahead of the other taxi and let herself in with the odd key she had found in her handbag. Benton Wood was not in time to see her do this and continued the pursuit to the Pennsylvania Station.

CHAPTER V.

Or had he seen her before? This was the question that obsessed David Morley.

He was among the first to enter the diner. Not that he was so very hungry, but that, rather, he was tired of staring through the window at his own thoughts. Moreover, he was tired of sitting opposite the fat man who had the lower under him.

He sat for a long time over his food, eating absent-mindedly, buttering everything.

He was troubled.

Had he seen her before?

At that moment it seemed to him that he must have met her at a dinner somewhere, years ago. He tried to image her as using a knife and fork, sawing at a salad, eating an artichoke, tasting a glass of wine— Glass of wine! With this last image, he had more success. He could see clearly her eyes, wide gray eyes, bitter and accusing, fastened upon his over the rim of a glass. As he watched her, the shape of the glass changed, became tall and straight, containing two straws, one broken, and a brilliant red cherry.

Lemonade! What an absurd idea! Those eyes!

David Morley pushed away his plate and rose from the table. He thought a smoke would do him good.

After an hour of staring through the window at his own thoughts, while a dead cigarette hung limply from between his fingers, he decided, however, that a smoke was not what he needed. Perhaps what he really needed was a good night's sleep. He had been working hard for two nights and days on the fourth chapter of his third novel.

He lay for some time in his stuffy upper, before turning out the lights, watching the little hammock which contained his collar and tie, shoes, and socks swing back and forth with the movement of the train.

He wrenched a magazine from his grip and tried to read. His hat fell off the hook above his head and rolled toward the edge of his berth, where its progress was stopped by the heavy curtain. He reached for it and stuck it into the hammock. After a moment, he pushed the little light bulbs back into their sockets and composed himself for slumber.

The train raced on into the night. David thought what a set of fools they were to lie there and go to sleep and let a man with whom they were all equally unacquainted—didn't want to be acquainted—probably have nothing in common if they were acquainted—'cept poker, perhaps, or Charlie Chaplin— Strange how many different kinds of people— What the devil had he started out with, anyway? Oh, yes! Rush with them into the darkness—ringing a bell, tooting a whistle, and spitting red fire to the sky, like a sure-enough dragon—like a regular chimera, mind you. Why, before you hire a chauffeur— Still, you go in public taxis, and you never see those fellows' references—probably all right—some of them all right—that guy this

afternoon was all right—some driver!—some idea of physics, too, and quite a hunch about crowd psychology. Fellow had a cauliflower ear. Wonder if he'd ever been a fighter. Wonder what he said to our kind friend who took so much trouble to see that fellow off on the train. Nice fellow—artichoke ear—

David Morley was very, very tired. This was the reason, perhaps, why he did not at once fall asleep. It was nearly an hour later when he reached up and turned on the light above his head and carefully removed the blanket from over him, stowing it neatly at the foot of the bed.

"Why don't they have some air in these boats? There ought to be a slight breeze, going a thousand miles an hour. My nose is full of dry cinders. Perhaps that's why I can't get any air."

Glad of an opportunity to be active for a moment, he searched for his handkerchief under his pillow and blew his nose vigorously. Then he sniffed the air for a moment critically.

"No, it's because I'm in an upper berth!" he complained. "Bad air rises. That fellow under me is sleeping all right. Perhaps that's why I can't. I knew he'd be a hearty sleeper the first minute I set eyes on him!"

He raised his head and looked out over the curtain into the aisle below, which was full of a whispering, velvety darkness. At one end was a bright light, under which sat a porter dozing over a newspaper.

"You bet he sleeps all right! You know why that is? It's because he's not supposed to. Now, if I wasn't supposed to— How do I know I am supposed to? Perhaps I'm not. Wait a minute! Of course I'm not supposed to! How could a fellow sleep with a lady crook pussy-footing it about his apartment, tying the silver up into neat parcels, busting his safe with a hair-pin—provided that she hadn't the com-

mination to it!—and getting his papers all mixed up?"

He lay down again.

"What you suppose she is really doing?"

Powdering her nose, probably, in his honest-to-God Louis Quinze mirror, and sorry she can't take it off on her back. Well, if any one was going to lug off that mirror, he would rather it would be a woman with eyes and hair like hers; she'd get so much fun out of it. Always thought that mirror ought to have a woman in front of it.

Funny about being a thief. One minute you've never stolen anything, and you're just as good as anybody, and the next minute you have stolen something, and you're a thief. Wonder how she started in. Picking somebody's pocket on the street— *Sitting over a glass of lemonade in the Brevoort!* He sat bolt upright in his berth.

On an August evening about six years before the opening of this story—which happened also to be the hottest night of the year—the Brevoort grill was crowded in all its inter-opening rooms with perspiring, uncomfortable people.

In the room nearest Eighth Street, always the particular haunt of poets and painters from the Washington Square district adjacent—that is to say, on any evening when they felt themselves sufficiently wealthy to make it worth their while, The Working Girls' Home, so called, in which John Masefield used at one time to wash glasses and perform other ignominious offices, being the resort of those ingenuous great when broke or near-broke—in the room nearest Eighth Street, I say, at ten-thirty of the evening in question, every table was filled.

The waiters, as hot as anybody; or hotter, loped about from kitchen to café, from café to bar, and back again, in and out among the tables, among the

people who, after several hours of such journeying, had grown to look to them all exactly alike, red-faced, limp, and irritated. People were cross to the waiters, and sometimes the waiters answered back, saying, "You know I have my troubles, too, madame," or, "I wonder if you'd be so kind as to let me buy a drink, sir, and put it on your check?" or, insolently, after an unimpressive tip had been ostentatiously left on the tray, "Maybe you need it yourself, sir, more than I do."

More often than usual, the waiters brought to the poets and painters, and to the painters and poets whom they had either married or not, things which they had never ordered at all, had never even noticed anybody else drinking, for these people seldom ate, but always drank, even when they did not particularly want to. And when such blunders occurred, one of two things was sure to happen. Either the person thus abused, because it was a hot night, made no fuss whatsoever about it and took what was set before him, or, because it was a hot night, made a very great fuss indeed, even to the point sometimes of rising and delivering an aggrieved address to the company in general on the subject of Why is a Waiter, or offering to meet the delinquent lackey in Washington Mews at midnight, armed with anything at all, and "learn him."

At ten minutes to eleven, a young man, tall and very good-looking indeed, with the kind of chestnut-brown hair that is sometimes called "crisp," dark eyes, and the kind of features that are sometimes called "clear-cut," looking very cool indeed when one considered how hot he must really be, in a spotless suit of some light silk material, walked through all the rooms of the café, finding no table whereon to lay his head, and finally came to the doorway of the room nearest Eighth Street. From a small square table along the side nearest him, as he stood looking toward the

back of the room, a lady who, because it was a hot night, had been inspired to drink one each of all the different kinds of cocktails in the world, had just been borne fainting, and very hastily indeed, by the two gentlemen with whom she had been sitting.

To this table David Morley now proceeded; he seated himself, and at the end of about ten minutes of waiting, succeeded in ordering a drink.

At this period he was not living in Charlton Street. It was not until some time later that Charlton Street, as a matter of fact, became a street where a God-fearing man *could* live. He was living up in the Seventies, a bit west of the park. He was not acquainted with anybody in the room.

Everybody else seemed to be at a private party of personal friends, so much at home did he appear, so free to rise and say, "Whew! My God, it's hot! I can't sit in that chair a minute longer!" and wander about the room, exchanging affectionate insults, gentle blows, or embraces, with the other ladies and gentlemen. Sometimes two tables would be pushed together, and as many as fourteen people would be grouped around this friendly board, screaming with laughter, rocking to and fro, or as full of tears as the Mock Turtle, reciting verses aloud in a very melancholy voice indeed.

David Morley was lonesome. It was too hot to do anything at all, but if he should decide that there was anything which it would be interesting to do, he would have liked to feel that there was somebody near who would have enjoyed doing it with him. He ordered another high ball, which he drank sadly, lifting it to his lips without looking at it, and now and then absent-mindedly essaying to drink it through the spoon.

His roving eyes finally settled on the only other person in the room who seemed alone among strangers, a young girl, with a white face, yellow hair, and

very extraordinary gray eyes, sitting at the table just in front of him. At first glance, she seemed to be well enough dressed, but regarding her more closely, he saw that she was pitifully shabby. She was drinking lemonade from a tall glass, with the aid of two straws, one of which was broken. A brilliant red cherry showed halfway up the glass.

David wondered who she was, and what she was doing there. She seemed, as he watched her, never to look at anybody, although her eyes were never still, moving about the brightly lighted, smoky, untidy room. He, too, looked about the room now, and thought how cool it must be on the beaches, and of the crowds of people who lay stretched on the sand there, doubtless, this very minute, in the sweet, fresh darkness, sleeping as unconsciously as children. Excepting that there were sand fleas, probably, to keep them awake. And yet people did sleep on these beaches, thousands of them, whole families of them, all through the heat of the summer. Only a few miles away from this unbearable heat blew a wind that was almost cold, so that if one had a coat, he would probably spread it over the girl who had gone there with him.

For no reason at all that he could tell, except that one's mind plays queer tricks on one, and you never can say what your next thought will be, David imagined himself on a sandy beach, deserted except for himself and the girl with the amazing gray eyes, who would be asleep, forgetful for the moment of what was making her so sad, under his coat.

When he looked at her again, she was industriously and earnestly and as if all her heart were in it chasing the cherry about the bottom of her glass. Finally she ran it down and ate it slowly and seriously, looking about the room.

"Why, she's just a child!" thought David. After which the thought came

to him that he himself was, after all, to a great extent a little boy, and that he would like to play with her. He would like to buy sixty lemonades and spear the cherries for her, one by one, seriously.

"I'm crazy with the heat, I guess," said David Morley to himself.

But after a moment his eyes went back to the girl in front of him.

"Wonder what is the matter with her?" he questioned. "No little girl is *supposed* to look like that—that's sure. So—so sort of bitter, you know, and as if she wouldn't believe anything you told her, no matter how nice it might be—as if she'd believe it less, the nicer it sounded, you know. She's had some hard knocks, I should say, poor kid. And it's easy to see she wasn't exactly born to 'em. Look at those fingers! Nobody but a—but the sort of person you mean by 'a lady' ever has hands like that. And the way she closes her mouth—wonderful—except that it's sort of hard. Lord, you could do anything with a girl like that if you'd give her a chance! As it is, I dare say she'll go straight to the devil one of these days, and nobody'll care a darn, herself least of all."

David looked for his waiter, who was taking orders from eight hilarious people crowded about the small round table beside his own. After a minute, catching the fellow's eye, he motioned for his check, taking from his wallet a twenty-dollar bill, which was the smallest thing he could find.

The waiter, with eight orders in his head and twenty dollars in his hand, rushed out of the room, scooping as he passed, from the table of the young lady, some change she had left there for her drink.

She also, evidently, was preparing to leave. David wondered if she had produced the money from her stocking, as she seemed to be carrying no bag. Then he tried to imagine where she would go

when she left the grill. It occurred to him that perhaps she had no more plans as to her next move in life than had he himself.

Just then the waiter hurried in. He set two drinks down sloppily on a table at which two men were sitting, deposited a tray of bills before the gray-eyed girl of David's contemplation, gathered up some empty glasses and a selzer siphon from a table near, and hastened back to the kitchen.

"He's given her my change," said David to himself. He carefully selected a cigarette from his case, tapped it on the table, and lighted it, meantime watching her face in the mirror.

For a moment nothing happened.

Then without turning her head, the girl moved her eyes from table to table in a slow survey of the room. David was thoughtfully flicking an ash from his cigarette.

He raised his eyes again quickly to the mirror.

With her eyes fastened on the door through which the waiter had disappeared, the young woman adroitly transferred the bills from the table to her coat pocket, leaving the change on the tray, and, rising, walked swiftly from the room.

David could not say that he was astonished. It seemed to him that a perfectly natural thing had happened. His only clear feeling was of a pity for the child which amounted almost to devotion, and an urgent sense that he must follow her and find her and befriend her for the rest of her life.

Now, as the train plunged onward into the night, David Morley turned from side to side in his uncomfortable berth, unable to sleep, unable to think, unable to do anything at all but stare before him at the eyes, the mouth, the hands, the so apparent weariness and wretchedness of the child he had *not* followed and found, and whom doubt-

less no one in the world had befriended, who was now no longer just a shabby, bewildered little girl, betrayed by a too opportune temptation which circumstances had thrown in her way, but a well-gowned and self-possessed woman, incredibly clever and accomplished in what had apparently since become her accepted field.

He wondered what she had stolen from the man who was following her in the taxi. As for himself, Dave Morley, whatever she might see fit to loot from him in his absence could not so greatly wrong him as he had wronged her years before, in passively letting her drift on and out of his horizon—he, a big, lonely fellow with plenty of money and nothing in the world to do.

CHAPTER VI.

The room in Morley's Charlton Street house was quite dark when Jane Pierce got to her feet, and an appreciable chill had crept into the air, the fire having died unheeded some hours before. There was still a faint light outside, she noticed, and, groping her way with comparative ease to the door at the end of the hall, she opened it and looked out onto the little garden.

A narrow walk, separating tiny, formal flower beds, running from the rough stone steps to the tall wooden fence at the back, in which was a door, nearly hidden from sight by a blossoming wistaria vine, cut the garden precisely in two.

"The red flags running wet and straight
Down to the little flapping gate."

Jane said this over softly, aloud. A cool wind came up, stirring her hair from her forehead. It felt good to her eyes, hot from weeping. She lifted her face to it.

A delicate fragrance from some unseen flower came to her nostrils, and the leaves on the sumac tree made a pleasant sound.

"It is a sweet night," she said. She sat down on the step and clasped her arms about her knees.

From the next garden, hidden from her by the high fence, came the sound of laughter and of dishes rattling.

Suddenly she realized that she was very hungry. She wondered if the man who had so graciously put his house at her disposal for three or four days at least always took his meals out. She earnestly trusted that this was not the case. He seemed to be living quite alone, and people who live quite alone, she had observed, usually do take their meals out. Still, she would go down into the kitchen and see. There might be a little coffee, and even the end of a stale loaf of bread.

David Morley always took his meals out except when he was working on a novel. During such periods, he preferred to eat alone, unaccompanied by his friends and acquaintances, who knew quite as well as he did all the restaurants and eating houses it was his custom to frequent. If he ate out, he was almost sure to be invited to somebody's else table, or obliged to offer a seat at his own table to somebody else, and no matter what he did about it, whether he was weak or firm, gracious or surly, that train of his thought was interrupted. It was an interruption, but for the most part only a physical one, to go out to the delicatessen's and buy some ready cooked food. Twice a week a stout negress named Blanche came in and, among other things, washed his dishes for him.

Jane found in the ice box half a roasted chicken, a large melon, three eggs, a half pound of sweet butter, some potato salad, and a half pint of cream. On the table were, coffee, rice, a large tin of olive oil, part of a loaf of bread, a volume of Herrick's poems, a pad of paper—on which were several aimless sketches of dogs and cats and the name David Morley written over and

over in an interesting, careless hand—and every possible species of unwashed dish. In the cupboard were six tins of spinach, a jar of marmalade, and some wizened potatoes.

The kitchen contained, to a hasty inventory, everything that a hungry woman could wish. But a later, more systematic search failed entirely to unearth the salt. Jane looked everywhere for it. There just wasn't any salt. Yet nobody, she was sure, ate his meals without salt. Still, a man who read Robert Herrick aloud to himself over his beans and bacon would be capable of anything. No, that was wrong—Robert Herrick himself had had a fondness for food; he was quite the proper one to read. However, she wished to know what Mr. David Morley had been inspired to do with the salt.

What *did* people do with salt, excepting to eat it?

They melted ice on the sidewalk in front of their houses. They froze ice cream. They gargled their throats with it—

She ran up two flights to the bathroom. But it was not there. They salt their beer. She ran down into the studio and looked on desk and table. Not there. A disconsolate glance about the room, however, discovered a round red box marked "Shaker Salt" on the floor by the fireplace, and a trail of salt on the hearth, which crunched under her shoe. She bore the precious mineral down into the kitchen, wondering what in the world he could have had it there for—to put out the fire?

Later that evening, preparing for a luxurious bath, Jane discovered that there was no soap in the bathroom.

"My faith," she said, "what an extraordinary man! Wager you anything you like the soap's on the piano."

Then, having decided that he had taken it with him, she went downstairs, resigned to bathe with laundry soap. She found in the kitchen a plentiful

supply of scullery cleansers and ammonia, but not even a wafer of yellow soap clinging to the top of a washboard.

Returning to the bathroom, she made a careful selection from a row of square bottles which read: Listerine, Glycerin, Peroxide, Rosewater, Hamamelis, Eau de Cologne, and so forth, and from among a promiscuity of smaller bottles of different sizes and prepared for her steaming tub a potpourri of sweetly-scented, healing, and refreshing lotions, in which figured several large hand-fuls of bath salts, a great deal of borax, and a few invigorating drops of aromatic spirits of ammonia. Calling to mind a tall black hawthorn jar she had seen on the floor in the Oriental bedroom, she rushed out, returning with both hand full of spiced rose leaves and little sticks of sandalwood, which she scattered evenly on the surface of the flood. Finally, much to her joy coming upon a squat jar of her favorite Pâte Agnel, she leaped hastily into the tub and out again, to lather herself from head to foot.

The one fitting climax for this orgy of luxury was sleep. Donning a pair of sea-green silk pajamas which she found in one of the yawning bureau drawers, and which her host was apparently somewhat averse to, as they had never been worn—"Love from Ethel," Jane guessed, "or from Trou-sers, her idea of a hunting suit"—she slipped into bed, turned out the light, and almost immediately was as sound asleep as if she had been a child or an honest woman.

She had left the door to the attic stairway open.

CHAPTER VII.

When Jane Pierce awoke, she did not, as one might have reason to imagine, rub her confused, unbelieving eyes and say, "Where am I?" Not for a minute.

When Jane Pierce awoke, she had not the slightest difficulty in remembering where she was.

The fact that she had no desire to move from where she lay, no wish to so much as raise one finger from its position of blissful relaxation—not so much as a thought even of getting herself to her feet, as quickly as possible, in order to stretch and rub her cramped, unrested body—proved to Jane, beyond a doubt, that she had *not* spent the night on the hard boards of her floor in Patchin Place. This kindly assurance alone would have kept her from asking any unimportant, foolish questions.

As Jane lay, enveloped in smooth, heavy white linen, she allowed her eyes to move slowly about the room. The sun was streaming in at the window, whose curtains, blown into the room from time to time by a breeze from the garden, gave glimpses beneath them of green leaves and now and then a patch of very blue sky. She considered if there were anything in the world which could get her out of bed. Coffee? *Oh*, no. Besides, coffee should be brought to her. Why was not somebody up and busy and about the house, bringing coffee to her? It was so much more fun to stay in bed if somebody else was up and stirring! That bathtub? *Oh*, no. Not after her luxurious dip of the night before. She could wait a half hour just where she was without the slightest uneasiness. Even a glance at her little enameled wrist watch did not distress her. Quarter past eleven, but what of that?

Finally, however, she thought of something which did bring her out of bed, but yawningly and without undue haste, even then. Slipping into a gorgeous black satin robe lined with scarlet and embroidered with one enormous gold dragon, and thrusting her feet into Chinese shoes much too big for her, so that she was obliged to scuff her way

along wherever she went, she made her way sleepily downstairs and, sitting down at the library table, lifted the telephone receiver from the hook.

She had to wait some time for her number and nearly went to sleep again over the business, but finally the call was answered.

"Hello! Is Miss Sanderson there? This is Mrs. Pierce speaking."

She was obliged to wait again for some moments, during which time she discovered that the cord of the telephone would not quite reach to the armchair, which inviting bulk she was quite too indolent to move to the telephone.

"Hello! Good morning, Miss Sanderson. How is Perry? Is he better? Oh, that's good. Yes, I thought so, too. Did the fruit come? And the mignonette? Oh, does he, really? I was afraid he might not even notice it, although he always used to love it so well. You can never tell about them, you know, when they're so—— I beg your pardon? Oh. Well, tell him I'm afraid I can't get up to see him to-day, but I'll surely see him soon. Tell him to take a good rest, and I'll surely see him very soon."

Jane hung up the receiver and remained for a moment where she was sitting, her face softened into a beautiful tenderness.

Presently her eyes fell on the telegram, lying on the floor where she had dropped it the previous evening. She picked it up and placed it on the table, which for the first time she observed to be covered with typewritten sheets of paper. A typewriter, still containing a half-written sheet, stood on the opposite end of the table, half concealed by a disorderly newspaper, its carriage flung to one side.

"Wonder if he writes."

She picked up the sheet lying nearest her and glanced down its length, curiously.

"The author certainly has no knowledge of women, whatever else he may know," she mused. "Either that or he lacks the ability to express himself. No woman would flatten her nose against a window, any more than she'd wear cotton stockings when interviewing a theatrical manager. Listen to this, for Heaven's sake! Impossible!" she read a passage aloud.

"'Of course, we women are different from you men,'" said Clara. "Men are unforgiving, but women forgive freely; it is their mother instinct." A gentle look came into her mild blue eyes, and she clasped her hands upon her chest, her bosom filled with emotion."

"Bosom filled with sawdust!" said Jane. She noticed that some of the lines had been scratched out and written in again. He was evidently having a hard time with it.

She read on for a moment, very much amused, then reached for the next sheet, still looking at the page in her hand.

"Oh, this is something different. What's this?"

The second page began as follows:

"The city, in a storm, is not different from the country. The thunder rumbles, the lightning flashes, the black cloud sags and bursts, and the heavy rain is spilled. To a man, iron wrought into a building is different from iron in the ore. But as for the storm, it falls simply upon the earth, where it has always fallen. It does not know that in the last few centuries some one has come and built a city under it."

Jane let her jaw drop in astonishment. This was not at all what she had been expecting.

"David Morley, did you write that?" she said, looking about the room. "But that's great stuff!"

She read on down the page; then, with an exclamation of amazement, she seated herself at the table and, quickly arranging the sheets in their proper

order, read them all, eagerly and with increasing admiration. It was apparently the chapter of a book. And what a book! Woman seemed to be the one subject with which he was unable to cope. He was obviously a man who had been in many places and seen many things.

"But what about this Ethel? You'd think a man must have learned something from a woman who would say, 'I need you. Come at once.'"

Jane picked up the telegram again and looked at it.

"Curious," she said.

Then a thought struck her.

"Do you know," she reflected, "I'll bet she's his sister? A man never learns anything about women from his sister."

She picked up a pencil and began making idle marks upon a sheet of paper, her eyes traveling over the many books on the open shelves, the walls, quite bare except for three rough sketches of men's heads, the untidy hearth, strewn with ashes and salt. Then her eyes came back to the table, and she reread the first page of the chapter that had caught her attention.

"I could do a woman better than that myself," she said, and after a moment began to write, scarcely realizing what she was doing, revising and adding to the material suggested.

CHAPTER VIII.

It had been on a Monday that Jane Pierce had sought in David Morley's house refuge from the man she feared and hated. On the following Thursday afternoon, she stood in the front room upstairs, looking out upon Charlton Street, reviewing the situation in her mind.

The master of the house had not returned, nor had he sent an ambassador in his stead to trouble her with investigations. The reason for this mysterious and peculiar benevolence she

did not know, nor did she trouble to question. She was conscious that he might return at any moment, and fully aware of the possibility of consequent unpleasantness, but she had long ago learned to seize upon the more salient features of any situation in which she might find herself, and not to be concerned with futile anxiety as to the less important factors. The important thing in her present position was that she had, by making free use of another's property, been enabled to avoid for three entire days a vicinity which it had become unsafe for her to approach.

She needed money. She must have by her the means of getting away from this house and into other quarters at a moment's notice. Moreover, she had been living on spinach for a day and a half and was hungry for food. By the end of another day, at the most, she must risk a return to Patchin Place and look up her pocketbook. But she knew that the longer she remained away, the more chance she had of discouraging the efforts of those in search of her. She had seen no further evidence of Benton Wood's presence in the neighborhood, and while this did not persuade her that he had given up his project, it did cause her to believe that she had succeeded in putting him off the track. She was confident that he had gained access to her room and searched it. She was equally confident, however, that she had left nothing behind which would be of particular use to him.

Her mind clear on these points, and comparatively at ease, she went downstairs to telephone.

She called the same number she had called earlier in the week.

After a brief conversation, she grasped the transmitter tightly in her hand and leaned forward.

"What's that?" she said. "No, I didn't get your letter. I've been out of

town. What's the matter? He's sick? What seems to be the trouble? I see. You say he's better to-day? Oh, that's good. Miss Sanderson, when did you send that letter? Tuesday." Jane groaned softly, pressing the transmitter against her breast. "I see. You sent it to Patchin Place, I suppose? Yes, of course. Would it be too late to see Perry if I should come up now? I see. I will be up in the morning. By the way, Miss Sanderson, where is Perry now? Oh, I'd take him in from the porch if I were you! I—I'm afraid he may get more cold. Yes, I know, but I think you'd better keep him in bed until I see him, anyway. The days are rather chilly still. And see that there's some one with him all the time until I get there. He—he might be lonesome. I know. Of course you do. But you'll take him right in? Thank you. I'll see you in the morning. Good-by."

Troubled as she was with an uncertainty as to whether or not the letter in question, which she most fervently wished to keep out of his reach, had fallen into the hands of Benton Wood, Jane nevertheless succeeded in remaining in the house during the rest of the day. For, as she reasoned, if there were no danger of his presence about the place so far as her own safety was concerned, there was equally no danger of the letter addressed to Patchin Place falling into his hands now. Of course, it was very possible he had already got his hands on it. In which case, it would be useless for her to go back to her room to look for it, and quite as useless at this moment as later in the night—which seemed, altogether, a more suitable time for her venture.

She could not see Perry until morning if she should go to him, and her going to him for no reason which she would be able to give, beyond a fussy and not too plausible interest in the physical welfare of a convalescent who

was merely recovering from a cold and was nearly restored to his normal health, would arouse a concern and possibly suspicion which she wished to avoid. In addition to which, and this most important of all, there was the fact that her own personal safety and freedom to move, provided she showed a proper amount of caution, in any direction she pleased, was of especial value to him, since he was unable to move about for himself.

Nevertheless, she put in a most restless and anxious evening, try as she would to assure herself that what she was doing was the only sensible and reasonable thing for her to do. She felt helpless and terribly alone, entirely alone, not only in this city, but in the whole world. She tried to think of some one on whom she could depend a little, ever so little, to help her in her trouble. There was no one. She had not been so utterly desolate for years.

In the front hall was hanging an overcoat of David Morley's, a capacious, rough, faithful-looking coat. It looked so absurdly friendly to her, somehow, as she happened to glance up at it on one of her many pilgrimages about the house—for she could not sit still for long in any one place—that she took it down and wrapped it about her. After that, she made a fire in the grate and, drawing the armchair close, sat before the blaze almost pleasantly for quite a while, from time to time stroking the rough material with her hand, or rubbing her cheek against it.

She chanced to catch sight again of the telegram on the table, which she had not thought of destroying, although its presence annoyed her. *There was a woman who had a friend, she thought. "Dave, I need you. Come at once."* And he had left his toothbrush hanging in the bathroom, his paragraph unfinished in the typewriter—to go to Ethel. No, she was not his sister. Or, if she were, Jane wished that *she* might be.

She got up and went slowly over to the table, looking pathetically childlike, the big coat hanging off her shoulders. She looked for a long time at the message on the yellow slip of paper. Then suddenly she picked up a pencil and scrawled directly under it: "*Dave, I need you. Come at once. Jane.*" After which she put her head down on the table and wept.

Jane had thrown her last coin to the Italian children who had blocked her taxi in her flight to Charlton Street. She was obliged now to walk to her room in Patchin Place, not a very long walk, but she had not been sufficiently nourished for a day or two, and felt somewhat sick and weak. To add to the already considerable discomfort, at about midnight, an hour before Jane started forth on her anxious quest, it had begun to rain; so that the fact that her raincoat was hanging in Patchin Place, seemed to be, ironically enough, the very reason why she especially needed her purse, which was in the pocket of her raincoat.

The streets were deserted, save for here and there a police officer, whom she instinctively avoided, a few loafers in front of the saloons, and now and then a taxi, rhythmically spanking the wet street with its chains as it sped along.

When she turned into the little court, she experienced a moment of actual terror. It was so dark in there that she could not have known if four men were waiting to spring out upon her as she approached her door. She felt as she had sometimes felt, when a child, in walking very slowly through some space of inky blackness, into which she was terrified to step and into which she had forced herself for no other reason than that she was terrified.

When she fitted her key into her mail box, it turned round and round, foolishly. The lock had been broken. She

put her hand into the box to make sure, but found it empty, as she had felt would be the case.

Jane smiled to herself, a noiseless, mirthless little chuckle.

Softly fitting her latchkey into the door, she entered and crept up the two flights of creaking stairs to her room. The hall carpet, under the tiny blue cone of gas which was always left burning, showed particularly ugly in design and offensive in color, as well as unusually dirty, after the house in Charlton Street. On the first landing, she smelled a strong odor of gin.

Upon entering her own room, she was immediately certain that some one had been in it during her absence. She could not tell what it was that gave her this impression, but she was convinced that she was right. A glance about, in the light of the one gas jet—which she turned down hastily as soon as she had lighted it, from some confused notion of silence—revealed nothing unusual in the aspect of the room. The blankets were on the chair instead of on the floor, a change which might, however, easily have been effected by Mrs. McPherson. And she rather thought that her umbrella, which was now hanging under her raincoat, had been left hanging over it. But she could not be sure about that. She crossed to the wall on which they were hanging and put her hand in the right pocket of her coat. Her purse was not there. Very calmly she put her hand then into the left pocket; and not until she had drawn forth the desired object and found the bills, and the check which she had not so far been able to get cashed, still intact, did she realize how intense had been the strain on her nerves which the presence of all her financial resources in this unguarded position had caused her.

This time she was very careful to place her purse in her handbag. Also, she packed her suit case with the things

she had most painfully missed during the last few days, and locked everything else which belonged to her into her trunk.

All this she did moving noiselessly and stealthily, starting at every imagined sound.

Then all at once anger against herself surged up within her. That she should move with fearful steps about this room, which was her own room, and about the streets, through which she had the perfect right to go, and even about the house of David Morley, in which her presence, unlawful and reprehensible as it might be, was no concern of Benton Wood's, infuriated her, causing her to lift her chin high and look about her with drooping lids and a disdainful mouth. If she were alone, if the actual welfare of another human life were not hanging upon her every movement, clogging her steps, then even the fierce revulsion which she always felt when in the presence of this man would be slight and inconsiderable in comparison to her need of freedom, her *habit* of fearlessness, she who had never been afraid before! She longed for the day when once again she could move without thought of him, and if it should so happen, meet him face to face on the street, without so much as a quickening of the pulse.

Yet for the present, she knew she must avoid, and quake with terror at the very thought of, Benton Wood—Benton Wood, who, the moment he should catch sight of her or become aware of her whereabouts, would be hot on her trail with a warrant for her arrest. And she must be free, and keep free, on account of Perry.

Obedying an impulse which she could not define, she went to the door which opened into the adjoining room, and listened.

Then slowly, stiffly, she drew back from the door.

In the next room a man was snoring gently.

Her eyes, turning slowly, fell upon an object she had not noticed when she first entered the room—a fat cigar, of which the one end had not been lighted and of which the other end was chewed into pulp, flat as the end of a discarded stalk of asparagus, reposing on the shelf of the sink in the little sink room, just visible from where she was standing.

She felt her hair rise on her head. And, for a full moment before her precipitate flight, she stood braced to meet the awakened, stampeded house. She was sure that she had screamed.

CHAPTER IX.

After the rain of the previous night, Washington Square was as fresh and green as a village common. The benches in the sun had dried quickly, but those in the shade of the trees, which were already thick with foliage, at eight o'clock were still damp, with large drops standing on them. Girls on the way to work came briskly along the pavements, but when they reached the park through which at this time of year they made it a ritual to pass, lifted their faces into the soft air, and turned their heads from side to side as they went. Sometimes, though not often, they stopped quite still for a moment, to watch the sparrows in the drinking fountain spattering shining drops into the sunlight.

Even MacDougal Street was transformed—not clean, exactly, but noticeably cleaner, and gay with color from fruit carts and open vegetable stalls, picturesque as a street in Naples.

And the little garden behind David Morley's house was the prettiest thing for blocks around. Along all one side of the wooden fence some little yellow flowers were blooming. And the walk down the middle, wherever a flag was slightly sunken, contained a tiny pool

of clear water, as bright with blue and green as a soap bubble. And all the sparrows who were not in the park were bathing in the gutters of David Morley's house.

Jane Pierce opened her eyes with a start and looked quickly about the room. There was no apparent reason for her awakening so abruptly. No delicate ornament from the top of the cabinet—sitting in perfection at the time when she went to bed—lay broken now in tiny bits beneath it. Buddha still sat musing on eternity, his hands folded over his stomach, and Shaka still stood beside him, guarding the room, one hand receiving and the other giving. The window, raised high on its pulley, had not without warning found its own way suddenly and noisily back to the sill. Neither was there a dog barking, chained in a backyard somewhere; nor was the telephone ringing in the room directly below.

She was about to close her eyes again when she saw that the door into the hall, which she had deliberately left open, was now closed.

She threw down the covers and sat up, reaching for the dressing gown at the foot of the bed. As she did so, there came a distinct tap on the door, a tap gentle and uncertain, but nevertheless persistent.

For a moment Jane sat motionless.

Then suddenly, with a swift movement flinging the black robe about her shoulders, she slipped to the rug and made a dash for the door, her hand outstretched before her ready to turn the key. At the same moment, a loud, muffled knock sounded, and before Jane could reach the door, it began slowly to open. Before she could throw herself against it, a voice addressed her from the other side.

"Now don't do anything like that," it said. "You'll be sure to spill the coffee."

And with a bowl of sugar in one

hand and a steaming cup in the other, David Morley elbowed his way into the room.

"I knocked many, many times, and you paid no attention to me whatsoever, any more than if I'd been a burglar. So I just had to come in. I don't make coffee very often."

After a moment of silence, he continued:

"I wish you'd either take these things and set 'em somewhere, or tell me whether or not I may open my eyes. It's no end queer standing here like this, not knowing whether you are getting ready to shoot me, or fall upon me with a pillow, or have just plain gone away."

There was no answer.

After a moment, David opened his eyes.

Jane, who had been standing stupidly, watching his mouth as he spoke, now looked up and met his gaze.

They stood for some time, staring at each other.

Then he said, "Won't you drink your coffee before it's cold? I've made coffee twice before, to have it fresh for you when you should wake, and here you are still sound asleep! I'm perplexed."

Jane smiled at him suddenly, with a kind of tired sweetness.

"I should think you would be," she said, not at all like an adventuress.

Then immediately she said, "Oh!" as if she had at that moment remembered something very unpleasant and important.

Taking the coffee from his hand, she drank it, slowly, but steadily, not lowering the cup from her lips, looking at him over the rim of it as she did so.

Then she said, "If you don't mind—I have to dress—"

"Surely! I beg your pardon," said David.

But he did not at that moment leave

her to herself. Something ominously quiet and absorbed about her manner troubled him. Supposing, when she was dressed, she should quietly, absorbedly, - go down the stairs and through the door and out of his life again, just as she had done the first time.

He looked all about the room and then back at Jane.

"I'm going," he replied hastily. "Only I wish you'd be nice and tell me what you're going to do after you get dressed," he added. "You're not going away or anything like that, are you? Just because I've at last remembered my duties as a host and come back to take care of you?"

"Take care of you"—what did that make her think of? Oh, yes, that telegram. She remembered suddenly what she had written on the blank space beneath, and felt that she must get into the library and destroy it before he saw it—provided he had not already seen it. She thought of the coffee, and flushed. Seen it? Of course he had seen it! Had he not "come to her"—because she "needed him?"

"If you don't mind—" Jane repeated. "I'm sorry—but I have something very important to attend to. I'll explain everything later, if you'll only let me—"

David Morley was hurt. He wanted to cry.

"I—I don't want you to explain anything," he said. "I just want— Oh, well!" He turned and left the room.

Jane listened to the sound of his feet down the two flights of stairs to the kitchen. If she could only get dressed and into the library before he had finished his breakfast, she might be able to destroy the foolish message before he happened upon it. She hurried, shaking off the insistent habit of her bath for two reasons, because she was in haste and because she no longer felt

at ease in the house, washed and dressed very quickly, knotting her hair roughly at the back of her neck, and ran down into the library, almost without a sound. The door to the library was closed. She opened it without ceremony and went in. David Morley was sitting at the table with his back to her, looking at something.

He started up as she came into the room, and she saw that what he had been looking at was the telegram.

"Give that to me!" she said, reaching out her hand.

David folded the paper carefully and put it carefully away in his breast pocket.

"It is a little letter to me," he explained, "from a lady I had not heard from for a long time—until this morning—and it is my intention never to let it leave my person. Of course, besides that, it's a telegram from my sister."

"'Heard from for a long time?'" Jane repeated.

"Yes," said David. "A lady I've been sort of looking for for about six years, off and on, ever since one very hot night when she walked out of the Brevoort with a bunch of my money, and I didn't walk out after her to tell her that I loved her, and that everything I had was hers, and all that sort of thing, you know. Here, don't do that!"

For Jane was swaying stupidly back and forth. As he spoke, she sat down suddenly on her knees, then fell forward on the floor. He caught her up almost before she had fallen and bore her to the couch.

"Oh, my Lord, forgive me, will you?" he cried, hugging first one of her hands and then the other, and then her head, against his breast, forgetting everything he had ever heard about first aid to the fainting—how you get away from them at once, and give them plenty of air.

Jane did not hear him. She was

wandering in a beautiful blue-and-purple field from which she wished never to return, although she felt vaguely that some time people would make her return, and she tried to impress on her mind very clearly all the beautiful blue-and-purple things she was seeing, in order to remember them and be able to tell all about them when she should be forced to return. Then, all too soon, she felt herself irrevocably returning, and tried desperately to fasten on her mind many lovely blue-and-purple things which she could no longer see very plainly—which were no longer so very blue and purple, except that she held them that way firmly by not letting herself forget that they had been that way—but which she would perhaps be able to see again as beautifully as at first, if some silly girl had not fainted somewhere, and if people would only stop talking, and if her hand—she thought her left hand, which she had foolishly placed somewhere quite out of reach—were not so very, very heavy and cold that she could not possibly lift it. If she could only lift that hand, something very important would be proved and established—she did not know just what.

David saw her poor, cold hand pitifully stirring and thrusting its fingers out painfully in awkward directions, and caught it quickly in his own, where he held it tight.

In a little while she sat up abruptly and looked at him.

"I know where I am," she said.

"Oh, do lie down again!" said David fearfully. "You'll make yourself worse!"

"I'm all right," said Jane. "I fainted, didn't I?"

"Yes," said he, "I'm so sorry. It was all my fault. I don't know anything. I'd rather do anything in the world than hurt you in the least imaginable little way, and the very first thing I go and do is knock you down!"

"No, the first thing you did," she corrected him, speaking very slowly and carefully, for she was beginning to feel very queer again, "was to bring me coffee in my room—or, rather—your room—that is to say, one of your rooms—I—have—no—idea—which—one—"

And she was off again.

This time David laid her flat on the couch and rushed off for a glass of water, which he sprinkled on her face and neck. He would have loosened her clothing, as he had heard of people doing, except that he could not seem to find the couplings. He did remember to chafe her wrists, however, and to take the cushion from under her head.

She was conscious again in a moment, and said to him that she was not in the least fainting, but only sleepy, very sleepy, for no reason at all that you could call a reason, and that it was very stupid of her.

She lay with her eyes closed for a few minutes, then opened them gravely and looked at the wall for some time. In a little while, she sat up, swung her feet to the floor, and rose. Her hair was down her back, the pins sticking out of it in all directions. She knotted it up quietly. Then she turned her attention to David.

"You have been very kind to me," she said. "As I think of it now, it seems to me that you are the first person who ever was; but that can't be true, I suppose." She paused a moment, then continued: "I'm sorry it was your money I stole that time. I would rather it had been anybody else's. And I'd apologize for all the rest of it—sleeping in your bed, and wearing your clothes, and using up all your things, and so forth, and going off without tidying up so very much after me—except that I dare say you have somebody to do those things for you, and the bed would be changed, anyway, and after all I've done, a few more can't

matter. But I'm sorry it was *your* money I stole. I'd rather it had been *anybody* else's. I'm going now. Good-by."

"Oh, please!" David entreated her. "Won't you even tell me your name, or where I can find you, or anything? You can't be just going away like this! I've waited so long to speak with you, honestly I have! Why, that night at the Brevoort, I wanted so to speak to you that, instead, I just sat there and made up all sorts of silly dreams about us—how we were out on a beach and together where it was cool, and you were wearing my coat, and how I was getting you all the cherries in the world you wanted, just taking them out of everybody's lemonade and giving them to you."

"Oh, it's wrong to do this—to just go away and leave me, you know, and not give me a chance! If you're doing it just because you feel you wronged me in some way—God knows I can't see it!—why, just think how much more you're wronging me by what you're doing now. I didn't want the old money—I'd given it to you already in my mind, and everything you wanted—and I didn't particularly *want* my old bed unslept in. But I do want you. I want you where I can look at you and speak to you. I want to know where you're going to be when you're away, so I can think of you there. Don't you see? It's the silliest thing I ever heard of in my life, but I know the way I feel. Oh, don't you *see* why it is I can't seem to let you go?"

"Oh, no—oh, no, no! Oh, don't say those things to me! I can't bear it! I can't stand it! I've stood just all I can! Oh, my God!"

She ran from the room into the hall, and in a moment she was gone. The door closed behind her.

For half an hour there was not a sound of any kind to be heard in the house.

CHAPTER X.

When David Morley had returned to his house at something like four o'clock that morning, he was conscious of a sense of high adventure. If he had found the interior of his house white ashes, within walls still standing intact, he would not have been astonished, not very. If he had found it transformed into a garden, with fountains and birds and all sorts of wonderful flowers such as grow wild in some places and in hothouses here, he would not have been astonished, not what you really call astonished. If he had found a little girl of about seventeen, dressed in brilliant red, seriously watering these flowers by pouring lemonade through a straw, he would have said it was exactly what he was expecting.

He had been thinking of her all the time he was away. And when he had found it necessary that he should come home earlier than he had intended doing—thus even bringing upon himself the necessity of a second journey in a few days—he had been eager to go, not to have the girl arrested, or to reform her, or even, definitely, to make love to her—provided he should be able to find her, which was unlikely—but mostly from a sense of high adventure, of whose component parts he could not be certain.

On coming into his house, he had gone at once to the Oriental bedroom. Not because he expected the girl to be there. He did not expect her to be in the house at all. And if he had thought of her being there, he would have imagined her as being in the front chamber. He went there to hunt for some papers which his sister had asked him to look up, and which were of the greatest importance to her.

Turning on the light, he stood for a minute staring.

Goldilocks! Asleep in the big bear's

bed—her hair spread out over the pillow! She was doing all the lovely things with her hands and arms that lovely sleeping ladies are said and sung to have been in the habit of doing. One arm was hanging over the edge of the bed, palm out, the fingers curled inward slightly like the petals of a full-blown rose. The other arm was bent, the sleeve pushed nearly to the shoulder, and the hand was actually under her cheek.

David stood looking at her for some time, until she stirred uneasily in her sleep, when he extinguished the light and retired hastily, having quite forgotten for what he had originally entered the room.

He went down into the library, there to catch a few hours' sleep, for he wished to be up bright and early in the morning, lest she should move or speak or sigh, and he not be there to know it!

And on the library table, spotted and deformed by tears, he found her message, a message to him, but not intended for him. And he did not get to sleep at all.

He sat now where she had left him.

At last he got up and went to the table which held the typewriter. He would try to get to work.

And then he came upon her version of his little discourse on women.

David knew he knew nothing about women. But he had somewhat the feeling, as well, that neither did anybody else. And here was somebody who did. Of course, she was a woman herself, which made it easier. But then there was Ethel. She didn't know anything about anything, except how to get herself into scrapes that she couldn't get herself out of.

Just then David came to something he couldn't quite make out. It had been written in a hurry and was very trying writing at best. But there was one word, especially, which, try as he would,

he could not decipher. And he wanted to ask her what it was. He felt that he could not rest until she had told him what that word was; it was so important, as it happened, just there; on it depended the meaning of the entire sentence. And then he remembered that she was gone out of his life forever again. It was exactly as if she had died, just as irrevocable and incontrovertible.

Just at that moment the doorbell rang. He lifted his head with an irritated frown. Then he went back to his deciphering the manuscript. Why should he open the door? It was nobody he wanted to see. It was either Doris Bailey from across the road, coming over to show him some new textile horror, or a man selling carpet sweepers or some kid selling tickets to something. Anyway, it was nobody he wanted to see.

He knew it was nobody he wanted to see, because there was nobody he wanted to see, not a soul. The only person in the world he did want to see had just gone off somewhere where he would never see her again.

The doorbell rang again. It suddenly occurred to him that it might be a messenger with a telegram from Ethel. He strolled through the hall and opened the door.

There stood, or appeared to be standing—he was conscious that he had had no sleep—the only person in the world he wanted to see.

She came swiftly into the hall, very much as she had on that other day. In her face was very much the same look she had worn on that occasion, but many times intensified and combined with something which she had not previously exhibited—a wildness, a helplessness, an aimless kind of despair.

"I had to come back," she said at once. "There was nobody else I could go to, and I can't seem to do things any more alone. They have stolen my baby.

I just called up the school, and they told me he was gone—disappeared. He was on the infirmary porch, and when they went to look for him, he was gone. I told them not to leave him there. I knew something would happen!" Her voice grew more and more excited as she went on, and became almost incoherent. "I told them to take him right in—and she promised. She said, 'Yes, Mrs. Pierce, I'll see that he is taken right in,' and she knew she was lying when she said it—she had no idea of having him taken in! Oh, if she had only done as I told her to! But every one thinks they know so much better than you do about your own child! Oh, Perry! Perry! Oh, I want my baby!"

David had stood for a moment entirely at a loss. He did not understand clearly what she was saying.

"Come with me," he said, suddenly remembering that she had just fainted twice, had had nothing to eat that morning, had just passed through some fearful experience, and that he was standing there like a bump on a log, doing nothing to help her.

He guided her into the library and seated her in the armchair. Then, seating himself at some little distance from her, he said judiciously, not looking at her too much:

"Now won't you tell me just what has happened? I feel sure that I can help you if you do, but you see I don't know anything at all about it. Tell me what is the name of the school, and what has happened."

Jane clasped her hands tightly in her lap, calmed in a measure by his quietness, and prepared to answer any questions he might ask.

She, it seemed, at the time she had entered his house, was being followed by a man by the name of Benton Wood, who was her husband, or had been up to the time, some months before, when he had divorced her on grounds of un-

faithfulness, a false charge, which, however, she had not contested, for reasons she did not now wish to give. For a year previous to that time, she had not been living with him, having left his house, with the child, during a short absence of his, Benton Wood's, from the city.

When she had learned that he was instituting proceedings for a divorce, her only feeling was of relief, although, for the child's sake, she had been forced to make use of the allowance he had settled upon her at the time of their marriage, long after, if it had been a question of herself alone, she would have refused to accept it; and when the divorce had been once effected, she would have no means of support; at least, she did not know what provision, if any, would be made for them.

Then had arisen a complication she had not thought of; a trick had been played upon her so fiendishly clever, so utterly heartless and flawless, that she could not possibly have imagined such a contingency arising. The very grounds on which the decree of divorce had been granted, grounds which, as has already been stated, for a reason of her own she had not wished to contest, and to which she had been entirely indifferent—the technicalities of her release from him being of no importance to her, so long as they opened the way to the constant, free, and uninterrupted companionship of her child—these very grounds, once established, had put into Benton Wood's hands a power, which, unknown to her, had been the paramount reason for his divorcing her—the power to wrench from her the only thing on earth she prized, she being thus proven by law morally unfit to hold the custody of her child.

Now came the incredible factor in this diabolical strategem. Benton Wood had no interest in the child whatsoever, save as an instrument whereby to torture her, since he was not the

child's father, the little fellow having been three years old at the time his mother, left without means for his support, had married Benton Wood.

"Had Mr. Wood actually legally adopted your child?" asked David Morley.

"No!" Jane almost shrieked. She was beginning to lose control of herself again. "He wanted to, but I wouldn't let him! He has no claim on him at all, not the slightest in the world!"

"But then it is perfectly simple," said David Morley. "Did I understand that there was some especial reason why you did not oppose Mr. Wood's false charge against you?"

Jane stared at him.

"Yes," she said, finally, in a low voice, "but I'd rather not go into that."

"That's quite all right," said David hastily. "What I want to know is this—did Benton Wood know of the existence of such a reason?"

"Oh, yes, he made use of that," said Jane. "That's why he dared to do it."

"Do you know," asked David Morley, "that that constitutes intimidation?"

"I know that perfectly well," she replied at once. "I knew it all the time, but he's got me. Don't you see? I can't do a thing."

"But there's something I don't understand," he said. "Was it Wood who placed the child in the school? If so, who kidnaped him?"

"Oh, of course, I forgot to tell you," said Jane. "It was I who placed him in the school. About a week ago. After a month of searching for him, I found where Benton was keeping him, and all day Thursday I watched the house. About four o'clock, Perry came out of the front door and ran down the sidewalk, chasing a little kitten. I didn't dare call to him or let him see me, for fear he would shout or make some noise, so I walked slowly down the sidewalk, keeping close to the hedge

behind which I had been hiding, and called the kitten instead, 'Kitty, kitty, kitty, kitty!' Do you see?" she finished eagerly.

"I see," said David, watching her face. He knew that he should love her until the day he died.

Jane sat still for a minute, looking out of the window into the garden.

"Benton didn't have an idea where he was," she continued, "until yesterday, or Saturday night, maybe. Then he must have got hold of the letter which I found was sent to me at my room in Patchin Place, and got the address of the school. I was afraid of that when they said they had written me, and told them to keep Perry in bed and some one with him every minute until I got there. They didn't pay any attention to what I said evidently, but left him out on the infirmary porch all by himself, and that's where he must have found him. It happened yesterday afternoon, an hour or so after I had telephoned."

They were both silent for some time after she had finished speaking.

"And Mr. Wood has got a warrant out for you on the charge of abduction, I suppose."

"I don't know, but I imagine so. That's why I've been hiding. I had no idea what the penalty is. I just thought that if I got put in prison or something, he could do anything he wanted to with Perry, and I shouldn't be able to do a thing about it. That's why I came in here to get away from him."

"How did you happen to have the key?" asked David, who had been wondering about this for four days.

"Oh, we used to live here—about two years ago—until I left him and moved away. It just happened that I still had the key and had no other place to go. But——"

"Yes," said he. "We must go right up to the school."

CHAPTER XL.

"We must each have two cocktails," said David, leaning across the table and smiling at her, "one to refresh us from the weariness of the day, and the other to nerve us for the adventures of the evening." A great tenderness came into his face as he looked at her, and he reached out his hand over the heavy, immaculate cloth. "And we must be friends—as if we had known each other always. It must never occur to either of us that we are strangers in any way. We must pretend to know all sorts of things about each other, such as how do we take our tea; and if you give me three lumps, I won't say a word, and——"

"I dare say it is your custom to take three lumps," said Jane, brightening a little and beginning to play.

"It is," said David, "and if I give you yours without any sugar, you won't say a word, and——"

"Oh, yes, I shall! I shall say, 'Thank you!'"

"I guessed it!" cried David. "You take it like your coffee. Why, there's no need to pretend! We are acquainted already!" Whereat they laughed merrily, and regarded each other with great friendliness.

"Now you must eat what is set before you," said David briskly, "and you're going to have things that aren't on the menu at all, so there's no sense in your spying around. You may have a Dykerie cocktail if you insist, however—most ladies do—whilst I shall indulge in a stinger. Waiter!"

The man hurried up. David gave an order swiftly in French, and so quietly that Jane got scarcely a word of it.

"*A ce moment, m'sieu'r!*"

"Stop your listening in, now!" warned David, turning back to her.

"I didn't get a word, except '*du fromage Port du Salud!*'" she confessed.

"Ah, and you don't know about that! It's a secret. We're going to have everything all mixed up. We're going to have two kinds of *hors d'œuvres* chopped up together, and all kinds of queer shellfish cooked up together, and the cheese on the salad, and the apricot brandy on the strawberries, and champagne made of oranges, and potatoes that you'd never guess to be vegetable, they look so much like waffles!"

"*Gaufrette!*" cried Jane.

"Now just for that," said David calmly, "you shall have 'em *julienne*. Waiter!"

"Stop!" she cried. "Please don't change it! I like them! Now just for that," she continued, as he turned back to the table, "I shall have the other roll, and both our butter."

"You shall have anything at all you want, excepting spinach," he replied. "And you might have spinach, too, except that there isn't any left in the world. A girl ate it."

"I left *one* tin," said Jane, blushing.

They were sitting inconspicuously at a corner table in one of the excellent-but-not-quite-new uptown hotels, on the evening of the day on which Jane had received news of her son's abduction.

Early that afternoon, they had gone up to the school to gather what information might be forthcoming as to his disappearance. But nobody seemed to know very much about it there.

The school authorities had not taken him in from the porch, because Jane had given as her reason for wishing them to do so that the days were still chilly and she was afraid Perry might catch more cold. And as it was the theory and belief of their medical department that plenty of fresh air is a fine thing for a patient with a cold, and as they had long ago ceased to hold in high regard the opinions of mothers and other relatives concerning the physical as well as the mental treatment of

the small charges left in their care, they had left Perry on the porch on the western side of the infirmary, where there was afternoon sunshine. As for remaining with him every moment of the time because he was lonesome, he was not lonesome; he seemed quite contented, listening to the birds singing in the trees about the building, and smelling a sprig of *mignonette* which he held in his hand. If Mrs. Pierce had had any premonition, or something more definite than that, of danger, it was not fair to them not to let them know. They were as deeply grieved and troubled as it was possible to be over the incident.

One of the infirmary attendants, a plump girl named Angie, who brought the trays containing the patients' meals to their rooms and made up their beds fresh every morning and dusted about a little—a sentimental girl who loved quite as if it were her own every child who, for certain periods of every day, was intrusted to her—testified that she had spoken to the dear child at exactly five o'clock, telling him what a fine boy he was and not sick at all, just pretending, and if he were hungry it was a good thing, because there were strawberries for supper. Then she had left him and gone in to prepare the trays. Returning for him at five-thirty, she had found his chair empty, the blanket on the floor, and no trace of him anywhere around.

The gardener, who was carefully tending the white iris in the beds to the south of the infirmary, had thought he heard an automobile drive up and stop in the lane which ran along in back of the building, and was little used except by heavy trucks and carts which were obliged to come around to the rear of the buildings to deliver their goods. But just then he had come upon a plant which had been pulled up by the roots—whether by an animal or a child he did not know, but he'd find out!—and as

to what happened after that he was unable to give any information.

They went to the house in Montclair to which Benton Wood had moved when he left Charlton Street, and from which Jane had made off with Perry a week ago, but it was quiet and apparently deserted, locked up, and the shades down. Besides, it was idle to suppose that he would bring the child there a second time, since this would surely be one of the first places his mother would go to look for him.

They had gone back to Charlton Street in an almost unbroken silence, Jane nearly ill and tragically hopeless, David going over in his mind all she had told him that morning and trying to get it all clearly arranged against the time, not far off, when he intended to use it, and not to no purpose, against the man who was making miserable the woman he loved.

That evening David had compelled her to go with him to a hotel to dinner, for she had been living on almost nothing for four days, and whatever of rare and delicate, not to speak of nourishing, foods he might bring for her into the house and cook there, the scene of her former frugality would be sure to stamp the feast with meagerness and distaste. Quite against all her expectations—for she had been unwilling to accompany him, saying that she was not hungry, anyway, and what did it matter where she ate, and she looked so ill and careworn that everybody would stare at them—she had brightened and relaxed under the spell of the gay, chattering people, the efficient waiters, who did everything so nicely and so unobtrusively, and the general atmosphere of cordial ease. It rested her to be able to do nothing at all for a few minutes, or, rather, to be unable to do anything.

And the gentle playfulness, assumed at first, and for a time difficult to maintain, had become at last so natural and easy a means of self-expression that

the end of the meal came as a shock to them both, bringing with it the realization of the world outside, the disappointments of the day, and the trying evening before them.

They left the hotel and took a cab to Patchin Place, or, rather, to the east corner of Sixth Avenue and Tenth Street, and walked the remainder of the distance, so that there should be not the slightest possibility of the sound of the motor suggesting to any interested listener their imminent arrival. Yet Jane did not actually believe that her former husband would still be in the room which he had rented next her own. Now that he had the child, he would have no further cause to track her steps, or so it had seemed to her. For she had grown more and more to feel that he would do nothing at all by way of bringing legal pressure to bear on her for what she had done, since, if driven too far, she might disclose the facts centering about their divorce proceedings, and he would be particularly concerned in avoiding this.

Nevertheless, she feared and dreaded the spot. And she had been unconsciously endeavoring to think up something else necessary to do before going there, when David, on their return from Montclair, had suggested that they visit the place in the evening. He wished to look for evidence of Benton Wood's having broken the lock of her door and entered her room, and also to have a look at the mail box which, though even more important, presented more difficulties.

On reaching the landing of the second stairway with David, Jane was greatly startled at hearing from the front room voices raised in altercation, and one of them that of her former husband. At first she was reluctant to enter her own quarters, even with David, but after a moment, since the voices seemed to come entirely from the other room, she made up her mind to

enter. And under cover of the noise, they were able to go in without being overheard.

They listened a moment. Then Jane drew down her brows in sudden effort to recall something. She thought that she had heard the other voice somewhere. Almost immediately some word pronounced with a curious accent struck her ear, and she recognized the voice as that of the young man who had moved out from the house the day she moved in.

She could not think what he would be doing there with Benton Wood. They evidently were not friends. Their voices sounded sarcastic, insolent, and angry. Once they heard Benton Wood shout, "Well, *find* your damned music and get out of here!" She heard no word which seemed to have any bearing on the whereabouts of her child.

David had advised Jane to stand where she could step into the little sink room at a moment's notice, for the hasp on the door was apparently merely thrust into the hole because it had seemed the place for it, and was ready to be jarred out at the slightest pressure. And if either of them should make a sound, there was a possibility of their being visited very unceremoniously.

The voices grew louder in the next room, and it became easier to distinguish the words of the younger man, which were naturally more indistinct than the other's because of his accent. They were mostly curses, however, except for a few words unheard by Jane, which caused David to put his ear to the crack of the door and listen intently.

"What's he saying?" she asked.

David shook his head, and continued to listening.

At the sound of a familiar curse, Jane made a slight movement backward, and the *jelly tumbler* fell crashing into the sink.

Immediately there was silence in the other room.

Then Benton Wood strode to the door and laid his hand heavily upon the knob. The hasp rattled loosely.

"Clear outa there!" cried David in a rough, unpleasant voice, after having taken several swift, noiseless steps back from the door. "For Gawd's sake, can't you keep me awake enough from your own room, without coming in here? If you don't shut up in there and lemme go to sleep, I'll complain of you!"

Benton Wood turned back to his own room, beside himself with irritation, and put the young Russian out by bodily force. Then he locked his door, sat down on the bed, and began taking off his shoes.

David and Jane overtook the young man in the court below, frothing with anger, ready to kill Wood at the first opportunity which should present itself.

"Wait here," said David. "I want to speak with him a minute."

After a moment he returned to her and said:

"Couldn't get anything out of him, except curses and prayers, which are expressive, but not very illuminating. I've made an appointment to go to see him to-morrow evening."

"But why?" said Jane. "What has he to do with it?"

"Haven't an idea," David replied briefly, "but you can't tell, you know. It's just as well to have a talk with him."

CHAPTER XII.

When David Morley returned to his house at about midnight on Saturday, from having questioned and received of the young Russian the information he desired, he stood for a moment on the step outside his door and looked up and down the quiet, empty street. He could not at first make up his mind to go in.

Upstairs, in his bed, under the covers

which he had so often carelessly drawn up about his shoulders, the perfume of her on his pillow, lay sleeping the beloved stranger. After the trouble of the last two days, two months—God knows how far back in the past her tragedy had its roots; six years, at least, as he himself could testify—an hour of peace—all being done that could be done, the matter taken out of her hands for a moment, things being arranged without her planning, at the moment when most she needed help, a shoulder to lean on. An hour of peace.

And now this! How could he tell her? He tried to think that perhaps he need not tell her, that in some way, if he were constantly on his guard, he might be able to keep it from her, at least until she was stronger and more under control. For she was nearly at her nerves' edge. She was at the point now where, at the slightest word of friendliness or sympathy, she would be incapable of controlling the trembling of her face, and had come at last—since people who are living in the same house and striving in the same quest must from time to time speak to one another, and speak concerning the matter in which lies their great mutual interest—had come at last to disregard entirely the shameful weakness of her facial muscles, and to ask questions, and answer them, with calmness and reason, just as if the tears were not all the while rolling down her cheeks, and her lips shaking to such an extent that sometimes her quite matter-of-fact words were almost unintelligible.

More than anything in the world, David wanted to drive from her eyes the bitterness and pain, to make her happy, to hear her laugh. He felt somehow that when he should have told her what now he had to tell, he should never hear her laugh, that she would never laugh again.

He fitted his latchkey softly into the

lock and groped his way through the hall toward the library, where he had slept the night before. He would go to bed and not tell her till morning.

Then it occurred to him that possibly she was not asleep, that she might be awake and waiting up to hear his news and, not knowing that he had returned, lie sleepless until morning. He would go up and listen at her door.

He crept noiselessly up the stairs and listened. Hearing nothing, he was about to go down again, when he heard her call.

"David!"

She had not called him that before. He realized that up to this time she must have been addressing him merely as "You," and that he had been speaking to her in the same way. He did not at once, however, take advantage of this step gained in the degree of his intimacy with her.

"Are you awake?" he called softly—not, "Are you awake, Jane?"

He opened the door a little way. The room was quite dark.

"Come in," she said. "Turn on the light."

He did so.

She was sitting up in bed, the tail of the black robe clutched sleepily about her shoulders, as if she had not been able to find the sleeves, blinking and shielding her eyes from the sudden-brilliance.

"What happened?" she asked at once.

The fact that she was alone with him in his house at midnight—his house? was she not in his very bed, and he at the bedside, looking down at her?—the fact that he loved her, as she must know he did, from the very way in which he did look down at her, even if he had not as much as told her so already, all these would seem to mean nothing to her in any way. While, as for him, her presence there, so near him, so beautiful and half asleep, set him trembling.

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He knew that in comparison to the possibility of his aiding her in her search for her child, or for any information concerning Benton Wood which might be instrumental in such recovery, such considerations as where she slept, how many people slept nearby, and who came to her bed at night with news of the chase, were of very minor importance indeed. In a way, David was glad of this. He loved the wonderful unconsciousness she had of all such little, quibbling things, her disregard of all save the essentials, her freedom from silly, womanish fears and tremors. But, in a way, he was not glad. He wanted her at least to be conscious that it was he who stood there, even though the fact of his presence in that particular place might seem of not the slightest consequence. All this went through his mind in an instant. He answered Jane almost immediately.

"Well, I—I found him," he said. A slight pause followed, in which he could think of not a word to say. Then he plunged into the first thing that occurred to him: "He's living in a garret up on Fourteenth Street—whole top of a big building, one enormous room and a little room besides—and he says he has to pay only ten dollars a month for it. Of course it's unfurnished. And he plays a viola, of all things in the world to play. I always knew there must be people who played them, because you find one in most every string quartet, but I always thought they must have it in the back of their heads some day to play a *violin*, you know, or at least a 'cello. Never thought of a fellow actually making a life work of—"

He glanced up at Jane hurriedly and saw that she was staring at him.

"But what happened?" she asked quietly. "What did you learn? To play the viola," she added with grim amusement, knowing that he had news which he was unwilling to tell her.

David looked down at his hands.

"What's the matter?" she asked. Then, more rapidly, "Is it something about Perry? Is he sick?"

"No. It's not that. It's not about him. It's about the sister of the boy I went to see, Fania Zaturensky."

"Well, but I don't understand—What has she to do with it—with us—with Benton Wood?"

"She's his wife," said David huskily. Then he turned away and leaned his head against the door of the closet.

It must have been minutes before Jane spoke. She sat staring at the back of his head.

"Well," she said finally with terrible quiet, "he has the right to marry again if he likes. We have been divorced for some time."

She looked hard at David, who turned then and tried to bring himself to speak. Immediately she resumed.

"It doesn't matter," she said. "I understand now. I just wanted to be sure what you meant. You mean he was married to her all the time, I suppose, that I was never married to him. You mean that Benton Wood is what you call a bigamist—and that I—"

"Yes, that is right," said David.

She looked steadily across the room for a moment, her eyes very calm, empty of expression.

Then, slowly dropping the garment from her shoulders, she slipped down under the covers and turned her face to the wall.

Instantly David was at her side.

"Oh, my love, my love!" He dropped on his knees and reached his arms out over the bed. "I can't bear this! I can't bear it! It's too much to ask! That you should suffer like this and I be unable to help you! When there's not a woman in the world that's loved as much as I love you—and they all have such an easy time of it, and everything they want, and nothing to trouble them at all, and I can't lift my hand to make this thing easier for you!"

And it doesn't even matter to you whether I love you or not! Oh, if you only knew how I love you, it would *have* to make a difference, dear! It couldn't help it. There's so much of it, it would have to mean something to you, Jane! Jane! I want so to comfort you, sweet love! Does it mean nothing to you at all that a man's whole life and body and soul are destroyed and worthless until your suffering is over?"

For a moment Jane made no sign of having heard him. Then the figure on the bed began to shake convulsively. David sprang to his feet and reached out as if to take her in his arms. Instead, however, he put his hand gently on her shoulder.

"Dearest," he said, "I'm going to fix this thing all up for you, and without your bothering with it at all. I'm going to put it together again just as good as new. And when you're not so sick and all worn out, I want to talk to you about something else. I wish you loved me a little, Jane. Because I want to take care of you and keep sorrow away from you all the rest of your life! I want you to marry me. I suppose it's a pretty poor time to be talking of marriage," he finished, under his breath.

Suddenly Jane burst into a peal of laughter. David recoiled in astonishment.

"Why?" she screamed, pushing him roughly away with her arm and sitting up in bed. "*Marriage?* Why *not* talk of marriage? Marriage is the one thing you *might* talk about! *Marriage* has no memories for me! *I've* never been married!"

David stared at her.

"But I thought——" He did not finish the sentence, but lowered his eyes and looked away. "God!" he said.

Jane went on pitilessly.

"Of course you thought! Naturally! Most well-dressed little boys do have fathers!"

"Oh, *Jane, don't!*" David was in agony.

"But Perry never had. I ran away from home one day with a man I'd never seen before—just stepped into his machine and drove off with him. That was my first marriage!"

"Stop! Be silent!" David rose to his feet and began to walk the floor, dragging at his shirt collar. Jane went off again into a shriek of laughter, which changed into heavy, terrible sobbing, and began again to shudder, this time so violently that the bed shook under her.

"Jane! Don't do that! Stop it! Stop it, I say! I've got to think, and I can't think if you do that. Oh!" He tore his hands through his hair.

Then he strode to the bed and seized her roughly in his arms. He held her cruelly tight, trying to prevent her body from shaking.

"Keep your little hands still!" he cried. "Here, stop that! Do you want to make yourself sick, child? Keep your little feet still!"

"I c-can't!" said Jane. Her teeth were chattering. She clutched at him with desperate fingers and began to speak in a tense, excited voice. "Listen. You mustn't say you love me. I'm not fit for you to love. I'm not fit to be in your house." She laughed abruptly at this point, for no reason that he could see, and went on at once. "If it wasn't for Perry, I'd get up and leave the place now, and you'd never see me again. But you're the only person on earth who *does* love me, and—God forgive me!—I can't honestly say I want you to stop loving me right now, before—before you help me find him. All I care about is to get him back!" She stopped. After a moment she said in a very low voice, "No, that's not true. It's a lie. However," she caught herself up at once, and continued bitterly, "never mind what else I care about. It's nothing to you—any more than it

is to me!" She laughed. "Nobody ever got very excited over what I cared about. I never *had* anything I cared about, till Perry came. And I've worshiped him."

"Jane dear, won't you——"

"I was so glad when I learned I was going to have him!" she went on more softly, her eyes very bright and shining. "Even though I didn't have any money, or a place to go, or anything. I was working in a Childs' restaurant then. And at first I didn't know what was the matter with me. And then I thought it might be that. I was so *happy*! Even though I didn't know where I should go, later, to—to have him, you see. I didn't dare say a word about it to any one, for fear I'd lose my job. And after a while I was terribly afraid they'd notice. You—you all have to wear the same kind of clothes, you know. And pretty soon the man told me they thought they could get on without some of the girls, and as I was one of the last they'd taken on, he guessed I'd better go."

"I pitied him, really. He was terribly embarrassed. He—he didn't look at me once while he was talking to me. And I felt that he knew about it and was sorry for me. But of course they didn't want me to stay there. And when I went back to work, after he'd told me—I didn't have to go for a few days yet, you see—all of a sudden, I was so *frightened*—I was *terrified*! I didn't know what I was going to do! And one of the girls asked if anything was the matter, and if she could help in any way, and I said, 'No, thank you,' and smiled as if it were nothing at all. Then all at once I caught her by the arm and whispered in her ear, and she said, 'Where's the kid's father that he doesn't look out for you?' and I said, 'He's dead,' which was true."

She was silent a moment.

"Funny thing," she began musingly, "I'd always lived in a beautiful house,

all my life, and had everything in the world you can get with money, until I went to work in Childs'. He had got an apartment for me here in New York, and he was there, too, almost all of the time. And then one day he didn't come to see me at all, nor the next day, nor the next, and I didn't speak to a soul in all that time, except the maid. She asked me what she should do about something or other in his room, and I said to leave it as it was, for he'd gone out of town and wouldn't be back for some time. You see, I thought he'd got tired of me and just gone away. I'd heard that such things always happened, but it didn't seem possible. We—we'd only known each other three months, and I *knew* he—why, I could *tell* he loved me."

"But there wasn't any money, after three days, at least only a little. It just happened that way, because I usually had quite a bit. So I had to do something. And it was half in spite, you know, and out of pride, too, that I got the job in Childs', thinking that when he knew, *then* he'd be sorry." She laughed. "We never get too old to do things like that, do we?" she asked, with an appreciative little twinkle of the eye which seemed to David the most incredible and ghastly thing he had ever seen."

He tried to speak, but found that his voice did not come. So he merely swallowed and shook his head gently, with an answering, deprecatory smile.

"It wasn't till I'd been in the restaurant four days that I found out what had happened to him," she continued, as if quite unconscious that an interruption had taken place. "There was a piece of an old newspaper sticking out of a garbage can in the park in Madison Square, and when I passed it, I caught sight of his name in big type, and something about his running his machine in between a street car and a motor truck—at that place in Herald

Square where there are tracks going every way at once, *you* know." She looked at David suddenly, to see if he were still listening.

"I know the place," he said in a curious, dry, matter-of-fact voice.

"I didn't read the whole of it," she went on, "because it was stuck quite deep into the can, and soiled, and I didn't want anybody to see me pick it out. People were beginning to look at me, as it was. So I walked on. But I saw enough. He'd been dead a week.

"I never went back to the apartment," she began again presently. "I had taken all my things, anyway, when I first left it, and got a little room in Greenwich Avenue. The beginning of my days of squalor!" she laughed. And it seemed to David that her laughter, breaking from time to time through the hard, unemotional surface of her narrative, was the most incredible and ghastly thing he had ever heard.

"I paid the maid when I left, and told her to come back in a week. I don't know what she thought when she came back! Probably his people found out about the place and attended to it. I didn't dare to go near it. I was afraid I might meet some of them there. And of course I didn't have much money, and I didn't get any afterward, because we hadn't been married—though I'm sure he would have wanted me to have everything."

She was silent for some time now, looking off into the garden and beyond it.

After a while, still looking out into the garden and not changing her expression in the slightest degree, she took up her story again.

"The girl in Childs' told me the name of a hospital to go to. At first I couldn't make myself go there. *You* know—go all alone to an ugly great building all smelling of anæsthetic, where babies are being born every minute in every room, like flies, and go up to a man

in some kind of uniform and say, with a whole lot of people looking you up and down and listening, 'Mister, I'm —' Well, you know. But at last I did it.

"'Twas what they call a city hospital," she explained, dropping her voice unexpectedly to a conversational pitch and turning to him. "It means you don't have to pay.

"To be born there is the same as to die in a poorhouse. Only, of course, the baby doesn't know—not till later, that is. He's sure to find out later.

"And there's something I want to tell you—David."

The sweetness of his name as she said it, gently, after a little pause, was almost too much for him. He shut his eyes for the briefest instant, then opened them, and looked casually about the room, to get control of himself.

"That night I stole your money, you know—it wasn't for me I stole it. I wouldn't have bothered to. It was for him. He was three months old then—and he was so *little*. I used to think he'd never get big! And I couldn't get work anywhere, because I looked sick, even when I put on rouge, and rouge was so expensive. At last I couldn't afford to get it, so, instead, I'd just pinch my cheeks hard before I went in anywhere to ask for work. But even then—oh, of course there was nothing I knew how to do—except pour tea nicely, and sing a little in French and Italian—no recommendation, when you're trying to get a job washing dishes or scrubbing the steps of an office building at midnight! Some of them said I didn't look strong enough, and some of them advised me to go into the movies, and some of them asked why I didn't go home where I belonged!" She gave a short laugh. "Belonged! Where anybody ever got the idea that people belong at home, I don't know! Listen—David, come here. I want to tell you something!"

"Yes, dear, I'm listening." He sat

down beside her on the bed and took her hands, very gently. He had a curious conviction that she was walking in her sleep and that if he should interrupt her, she might step off a precipice. "Tell me all about it."

"I left home for the funniest reason! What do you suppose was the reason I left home? You'd never guess. I left home because my sister said a certain shade of ribbon was 'characterless!'"

"It was the summer I was seventeen. I lived in Cleveland, Ohio. I was what you call 'born of wealthy parents,' and I'd been sent to a boarding school and was what you call 'finished.' My sister Belle was going to be married in October. It was the last of September then, and I was going to be her maid of honor. And, oh, the house was terrible! You know—nothing but clothes, clothes, clothes! And people shopping for clothes, and people being fitted for clothes—and every day Belle either fainting away while she was standing being fitted, or going off into hysterics for no reason at all! And all the time there were parties—and they were so silly! All very young girls, and all they talked about was clothes. If they mentioned at all the men they were 'engaged' to, it was just to say how good-looking they were, or how 'divinely' they danced." David could hear the quotation marks.

"Oh, it was all so *false*! A wedding seemed to be just one more occasion where you could show off before your neighbors. Oh, and there were the engagement rings! They had to be a diamond, and the setting had to be platinum, or you weren't *anywhere*! You might just as well give up the idea of marriage entirely. And there was such jealousy among the brides-to-be in that city as to which had the most beautiful one and, as far as you could tell by turning it over and over and taking into consideration all its aspects, the most

expensive!" Jane laughed, a loud, shrill laugh.

"Well, I knew that was the way things were," she went on immediately, and as if she had never laughed. "I had seen it all my life. Nothing that might really be said to count, in the life of a human being, counted at all in the kind of society my family moved in. They didn't *want* anything real; they preferred the other kind of thing. They didn't want the truth about a thing. All they wanted was to be perfectly comfortable in body and mind. I'm telling you all this because I want you to understand just what finally happened. You see what kind of people they were?"

"I see," said David. He wanted to say more than that, but he could think of nothing to say.

"Well, listen. One day the gardener's boy, that I used to play with before they sent me to boarding school and told me to have nothing more to do with him, came up to me while I was out cutting some roses, and said—oh, I shall never forget the way he said it; his words were so curious and dreadful—'Miss Janet'—my name is really Janet Perry, David, not that it matters much—'Miss Janet,' he said, 'I hear your sister is going to marry Fred Brewster.' And I said, 'Yes. Why?' And then he said, 'Well, there's something about him I guess she doesn't know, and I think you ought to tell her. There's a girl I know, sister of a feller I know, that he ought to marry. I think you ought to tell her.' 'What do you mean?' I asked; and he said, 'I mean he's got a girl in trouble, and his father is giving her father money to hush it up. She says he promised to marry her, and I've got a way of knowing it's true. They've been going together for a long while, and she's crazy about him—cries all the time, and says she's going to kill herself. I thought you ought to know.'

"Well, I went into the house and told

my mother. Belle was out. I had never had ten minutes' serious conversation with either of them in my life. And you can't imagine how hard it was to tell her. I thought she'd go all to pieces, you see. But she didn't seem to be astonished at all. I thought afterward she must have known it at the time. She just said I ought to be ashamed to talk about such things, and that I mustn't say a word about it to Belle.

"Well, when Belle came in, I followed her right up to her room to tell her. I loved her then for the first time, for a minute. I had never loved any one before—I couldn't, you see, because I'd never seen anybody to either admire or pity—but just then I pitied my sister terribly. I thought how hard it would be for her to give up all the pretty clothes she cared so much about, and send back all the lovely presents—and have everybody know why she was doing it."

"Then I told her. And this is what she said: 'I don't believe it! It's not true! *And if it is true, I don't want to know it.* What a heartless, terrible thing to tell your own sister just when she is going to be married!' And, David—would you believe it?—preparations for the wedding went on *just the same!* No one paid the slightest attention to the thing I'd told them. They just kept on making clothes! To cover their bodies! So that they should be hidden, too, just like their minds!" Jane laughed again. "It really is so funny, the way people live, isn't it?" she said; then went on without waiting for a reply.

"On the afternoon of the second day after that, I went with my mother and Belle on a shopping tour of the town. They said I must go, because we hadn't got my slippers yet. I knew I wasn't going to be the maid of honor at my sister's wedding—I knew I couldn't be—but that was all I was sure of. And until I'd decided what I was going to do,

a few slippers more or less didn't matter. I could have tried on slippers all day and not have known I was doing it.

"Well, late in the afternoon, we stopped at a ribbon counter to match some ribbons and stood there for over an hour. And I listened to their silly talk until I thought I should go mad! Ribbons! Oh, my God, it's the funniest thing the way people *live!* And after over an hour of it, when my mother said, 'Haven't you something a bit narrower than this in the same shade?' the clerk replied, 'No, madam, but we have the width you want in a very slightly paler shade. This shade is very fashionable this season. We sell a lot of it. You can scarcely tell it from the other.'

"Well, it struck me as so funny that one shade should be 'fashionable,' and approved, and selling to everybody, while the other—that you really couldn't tell from it at all—should be unfashionable, and so forth, that I wanted to scream with laughter. But just at that moment my mother said, 'What do you think of this, Belle?' And my sister took the two ribbons and regarded them for a long moment under the light, her head critically to one side. Finally she turned to mother, and said, 'Well, don't you think this one is just a bit—characterless?'"

Jane threw back her head and shouted with laughter.

"*Characterless!* That word! On top of what had been going on in my mind while I watched them! That was the end. 'I've got to get some hairpins,' I said, and walked straight through the store and out onto the street. I stood on the curb a minute looking up and down, and just then a machine drew up beside me, and a man's voice said, 'Want a ride?' I looked up and saw a good-looking young man I'd never seen before, and looked away again, thinking he had been speaking to somebody else. In a minute I glanced

around and saw that he was still looking at me. 'Were you speaking to me?' I said. And he said, 'Yes, don't you want a ride? Take you anywhere you like.' I hesitated a minute, thinking he had a nice voice and wondering who he was."

She paused a minute.

"It doesn't seem possible he's dead—even now," she said.

"And then he said—playfully, you know, and boyishly; I knew he was joking—'Better come. Come on. Take you to New York if you say the word!' New York! It seemed a thousand miles away. To be lost! Never to see again any face I'd ever seen! 'All right,' I said. 'That's where I want to go.' And I stepped into the car."

There was silence in the room for a minute. A breeze came in and rattled the shade against the window. David's brows were drawn sharply together with pain, and his fists had been clenched so long they were growing numb. He opened and shut his hands several times.

"And he—he was Perry's father," Jane continued, more softly. "He was the first person who had ever loved me. And it was so wonderful to be loved, and have somebody pay attention to me, that I couldn't help loving him, too. He was very sweet—and very reckless and young. I always felt older than he from the very first, though he was really six years old than I. He was twenty-two. He told me he fell in love with me the minute he saw me standing there on the sidewalk. And he wanted to marry me, from the beginning. But I wouldn't let him. I'd seen enough of marriages. It seemed to me that what we were doing was at least honest and real. And I thought to marry him would change it all. Afterward, though, when Perry came, I was sorry I hadn't." She leaned back wearily against the pillows, and was silent for a moment.

"Won't you lie down, dear, now, and try to be quiet?" said David at last.

It had seemed to him that her terrible, relentless words would never be done with beating upon his ears. The silence throbbed in his temples now, and he felt sick and weak.

Instantly her most distressing mood, which she had lost altogether for a time, returned to her—the mood of ghastly derision.

"Be quiet?" she repeated in an aggrieved voice. "Don't be so rude when I'm telling you a story. You want to listen to this. It's a thriller!"

She pushed him away from her and sat up, clasping her arms about her knees. Her eyes shone with a feverish eagerness. She leaned forward.

"Now if somebody advised you to get a job in the movies, how would you go about getting it? Why, you wouldn't know *what* to do! Of course you wouldn't! And I didn't. I didn't know where to go, nor whom to see, nor anything about it. You have to have a friend, you see, to get you in. That's the way it's always done. And I didn't have a friend. All I had in the world was a family I'd run away from, and a dead man that never had belonged to me anyway, and a little sick—illegitimate baby that—"

"Jane! Don't! Oh, please don't!"

"That I couldn't get a cent to buy food for," she went on inexorably. "And the next thing I did was to steal your money. Here, don't get up and walk around!" she cried, with that curious brutality sometimes shown by people who are in agony of soul toward those whom they know to be suffering with them. "Show some interest in my sad tale!"

David turned and came quietly back to the bed. He took her hands and stood smiling down at her gently.

"Little girl," he said, "Jane's baby won't know his mother the next time he

sees her if she goes on like this. And maybe she'll get sick and die, who knows? And then poor Dave Morley, who doesn't know a thing in the world about gentlemen under ten, will have to bring Jane's baby up all by himself, and he'll be almost sure to do it badly." He smiled at her again. "Isn't that so?" he said.

Jane looked up at him for a moment, with her head to one side, and regarded him curiously. For a moment there was no softening in her face, and David's little attempt at whimsey began to echo out of place and absurd in the unbroken heaviness of the scene. A slight smile came to one side of his mouth, and he looked off across the room, laying her hands back in her lap as he did so. His bitterness and disappointment were plain.

An unexpected sound, a little catch of the breath, caused him to look back at her. Her mouth was quivering, and her eyes were full of tears.

"David—David," she whispered, looking straight up into his face, her head thrown back till it nearly touched her shoulders. Suddenly she reached up one hand, half fearfully, and laid it against his cheek. "You're so wonderful!" she said. "You're so kind—so kind!"

"Oh, child!" He caught her hand from his cheek and pulled her to her knees in front of him. Seizing her by the shoulders, he leaned over her, looking searchingly into her face. Then he thrust her from him. "No matter," he said.

"Only," he broke out again fiercely, "don't ever again say to a man who loves you that he's kind! There's nothing under God's sky he'd not rather hear you say! Can't you see, for God's sake? It shows him so much—because, if you loved him at all, even if it was ever so little, you'd say *that*—don't you see?—when you think he's kind—instead of that he's kind! Oh, Jane!"

Just then her body, upright on the unstable mattress, swayed heavily against him. Instantly he flung his arms about her and bent over her.

"Jane!" the word broke from him in a despairing gasp. "I can't help—Forgive me—sweetest love—" Then the room swam before his eyes, and he dropped his face to hers.

At the touch of her lips utter madness seized him. He moaned aloud, and threw up his head. Then he brought his mouth down upon hers in an onslaught of love that blinded her and bereft her of all strength, sweeping her out with him upon its current. "Don't!" she cried suddenly.

"David! I implore you! David!"

He dropped her back on the pillows with a groan, and strode to the door.

"Good night," he said huskily, and went out.

CHAPTER XIII.

Dicky Webb, medium weight, a popular man in the ring only a few years before, but now, his wind having gone back on him—leaving him, as he put it, with only a "gentle zephyr"—reduced to running a taxicab for his livelihood, was sitting at a small table in the National Lunch, eating beefsteak and onions. It was Sunday evening.

It had been a good day for Dicky. A young couple, married at high noon from a Catholic church on Fourteenth Street, had chosen to dash off in his cab and be driven for five hours or thereabouts up the Hudson, to the spot which they had chosen as the setting of their honeymoon. Dicky had preferred to wait for his dinner till he got back to the National, where he would be sure to get plenty of hot coffee with real cow's cream; and he was now enjoying that luxury to the utmost, thinking how funny it is that in places like Boudin's, where in his palmier days he had sometimes been pleased to dine, you can procure real cream for neither love nor

yet for money, and in the National nothing is easier.

At the table with him was another cabby, who also received the greater number of his calls through the restaurant they were in, and together they discussed the chances of a third man, up the second time for reckless driving.

They had finished with their steaks and were well started on their baked apples and crullers, when Dick's friend, after leaning as far as possible out into the aisle in order to regard to better advantage those sitting several tables in front of them, pointed out a man who had just seated himself, his back to them, three tables away.

"You see that guy? Well, he's a piker. Don't never do nothin' for him. I had him a few days ago."

"What was he, stingy wid his coin?" asked Dicky. "Or did he wanna give youse a night's lodgin' for de ride? I've had 'em like dat."

"Nope, that wa'n't it. He was all right there. Only I didn't exactly like the business. Had to leave my lunch half et, he got so excited, and take him 'way over in Jersey and up the river to a place I'd never been before, to steal a kid. Looked like what he was doin', anyway. Poor li'l feller didn' wanna go, that's a cinch. Kep' yellin' for his mother and sayin' he was told to stay there and not go anywheres with any one. 'Twa'n't my business what he was doin', but I didn't like the way he used the kid. Pretty little feller, too. Stood there—with a little piece of flower in his hand, hangin' onto it tight. The big guy asked him where he got it, and the boy said his mother gave it to him, and then he laughed and said it looked like some of her stuff and told the kid to throw the thing away. When the kid hung onto it, he got hot and began to swear a streak and shook the little feller till his teeth chattered, callin' him a—— Gee, I wish now I'd done what I wanted to and give' him what was

comin' to him! Awful pretty little feller," he added. "Polite, too."

At this point the man in question, becoming impatient for his food, turned completely around in his seat, to look for the waiter, who was busy in the back of the room. Dicky recognized him immediately.

"Oh, dat guy!" he said. "Him an' me's old pals. Went to Sunday school togedder. I'm in love wid him. Waltzed up to me de udder day like he'd be pleased to slap my wrist for me. Gee, I was scared for a minute. Trembled all over."

They both laughed, a loud guffaw.

"So he's a kid stealer, is he?" said Dicky unpleasantly, looking at the back of the man's neck. "De night we danced togedder, he was chasin' a woman. She was too cute——" He stopped suddenly, struck by a thought. "Whadda youse know but dey're all one happy family!" he surmised.

Immediately after, he became serious and began asking questions.

"Member where youse took de kid?"

"Sure."

"T'ink youse could go dere again?"

"Sure. I guessso. What's de big idea?"

"Oh, nuttin'. Now an' den I does a little sluggin' on de side, jes' to keep my hand in. I'd hate to t'ink I'd never see dat guy again. Can't wait to git my arms around 'im. He certainly made a hit wid me."

Dicky Webb was a philosopher, but not a socialist. He did not believe one man was as good as another; he knew better. He had seen it work out. The best man was the one on the steadiest legs, the one with the quickest eye, the longest reach, and the coolest head, the one who was never taken off his guard; the best man stood up, while, somewhere in the swimming vicinity, some one counted the other man out. Dicky had seen the balances shift. He had worn his transient laurels with some

modesty. He had taken his medicine without a capsule.

He was a peaceable man. Save for a few landmarks on his brief trail as a searcher for book learning, the most of his fighting had been done in the ring. But there were times when he thirsted. And now, strangely enough, he felt the call. He considered the back of Benton Wood's neck, and he could feel the pound of blood against his temples; far off on the horizon appeared a soft red mist, which deepened as it neared until it colored his vision.

"I didn't—like—dat guy," Dicky Webb muttered thickly.

CHAPTER XIV.

David sat for some time in the library downstairs, his head in his hands, staring at the rug. His thoughts were in a tumult.

Why had she kissed him like that if she didn't love him at all? How could she? He got up and paced the floor.

What had been hard to bear before would be a thousand times harder now. There had never been a moment when they were together, even when they were ostensibly absorbed in other matters, that he had not been acutely conscious of her presence. Her voice thrilled him. Her long-fingered, aristocratic hands were mysterious to him. And when she pushed in a hairpin, or adjusted a slightly twisted skirt binding, or shrugged her wrist out of her sleeve to regard her watch, he felt himself to be present at a ritualistic ceremony. She was all wonderful. All her little ways were sealed with distinction.

And she exhaled a sense of power and fearlessness that he had never seen before in a woman.

He had thought women puny-minded, meticulous. Even Ethel, his sister, though she was trying to do a man's work in the world and had succeeded

in getting herself jailed as a suffragist, and, just now, indicted as a labor agitator, even she emotionalized and sentimentalized whatever platform she might be upholding, and was unable to see that she was letting the little things get in the way of the big things. This woman was different.

That was why he could not understand her now. Why had she kissed him like that unless she had been stirred by an emotion similar to, if not equal to, his own? There must be a reason. There was a reason for everything she did, he was sure. She was not a woman to be swept off her feet by an easy passion. Whatever her life might have been, in that stormy past of which he knew he had glimpsed only a portion, he was assured she had chosen for herself, and only after weighing in the balance all possible courses of action.

"God forgive me, I can't say I want you to stop loving me before you find him!" The words flashed across his mind. Oh, *God*, no! Oh, what a helpless, foolish thing a brain could be!

But the thought haunted him.

Finally, when he could bear his doubts no longer, he went up to her room and knocked softly on her door.

"Jane, are you awake?" he called.

"Of course I'm awake," came the answer instantly.

"May I come in?"

"Oh, of *course* you may come in!" The words sounded half impatient and half amused. It occurred to David that she might under some circumstances speak in just that way to Perry, though he could not say just why he had thought of that. He opened the door and went in. The light was still on.

She was sitting on the floor by the window, her arms on the sill. As he entered, she turned her head, which had been over her shoulder looking at the door, and looked out again into the garden, her chin on her arms.

He came over to the window and

stood looking down at her. There was silence for a moment.

"Jane, do you hate me?"

She did not move or speak.

Suddenly she turned and threw her arms about his knees, leaning her head against his body. "David—David—David!" she said, and reached her arms up about his waist. Then she released him and stumbled to her feet, one hand on the window sill.

She stood before him, very tall and slender, her hands clasped loosely behind her back, her head erect, looking him in the eyes.

"There's something you might just as well know, David Morley," she said, "though it can't possibly make much difference in your life, except, perhaps, to make you sad. Not because you are kind, or because I need you, or because you kissed me"—here David's eyelids flickered slightly, but he did not move—"not even because you—look like a young king in a fairy tale!" her voice growing warmer and her words coming more rapidly. "I have no idea *why* it is, and that's what makes me sure of it. David, I love you! Oh, I love you so much! But I——"

"Jane! You don't mean that!" He seized her by her wrists and looked closely into her face. "Say that again—what you just said!"

"I love you," she replied softly, with a sweetness that set him reeling. "No, let me finish what I—— Oh, but surely you must have known that I love you! I wouldn't have told you, if I'd thought there was a chance in the world of my keeping it from you. But you couldn't help seeing it. Why, I've loved you from the very first minute, dear—since that morning—why, it was yesterday!"—she laughed—"since that morning a thousand years ago yesterday, when you stood in this room with your eyes shut, and——"

"Jane!" David flung back his head

suddenly and looked at her, his lips parted, his eyes very bright, his whole face at once strained, incredulous, and radiant, like a boy that has just won a race.

She looked at him quietly, sadly, almost indulgently.

"David dear," she said after a moment, "it's no use. That's what I wanted to tell you. I couldn't have helped loving you, not possibly—so I don't bother about that. It's not my fault. But I can help from wronging you more than I already have done, and that's what I'm going to do. We can be friends, maybe, I don't know—probably not. But we can't be more than that. That's all I wanted to say, my dear."

"It's no use your talking to me like that!" he cried. "That's what's no use. You can't hurt me now—no matter what you say. Nobody can ever hurt me any more! You love me. You can't take that back. I don't give a hang about anything else! You've said you love me—that's the whole thing. How either of us can go on *talking words* after that, God knows!"

His youth and exaltation were unassailable. Jane said nothing. Presently, however, she looked away from him and sighed.

Instantly he was all humility and tenderness.

"Sweet love, what is it?" he asked, taking her hands very gently in his own. "I'm sorry if I've troubled you or tired you. You must go right back to bed, dear. Here—Dave do it!" He picked her up in his arms, bore her to the bed, and, holding her like an infant half over his shoulder while he turned back the covers, laid her down and tucked her in till only her face could be seen.

"Want your hands out? All right. Here you go!" He drew her hands out from under the sheet and placed them

on the cover. "There! Now kiss Dave good night!"

She smiled and, reaching up her arms, drew his cheek down to hers.

"Oh, sweetheart, sweetheart!" he whispered. "I won't distress you any more, dear. I won't do anything you don't want me to do. Only, just for the next few days, while we're working so hard together, *don't* tell me that it's all no use! I don't know what the trouble is, but whatever it is, let's pretend for a little while it isn't so, and forget everything but that we love each other—and that you're going to have your kiddie back again—and be happy. I'll be good. I promise."

"Do you know," said David Morley, "they say there is a secret passage under this walk?"

It was nine o'clock the next evening, Sunday. They were sitting in the garden, Jane reclining, rather, on a wicker chaise longue, robed in a gorgeous kimono of brilliant peacock blue, embroidered in silver snails.

She had come to see that David was doing everything that could be done toward the recovery of Perry, and to understand that Benton Wood would not dare to harm the child in any way. Still, her desire to see him became at moments almost unbearable. At such times, she would sit in perfect silence, staring at the tiny picture in the back of her watch. If they only knew where he was, then they would not have to wait for the tedious accumulation and arranging of the evidence which they held against her former husband. They could just go and steal him back, she thought, and prove to Benton Wood later that it would be to his advantage to offer no objection.

But, having decided that matters stood as they did, and that worry and impatience could do nothing but react upon herself, wearied out as she al-

ready was by the events of the past two weeks, Jane had given herself up to the happiness of the moment. She had even forced herself to forget, as David had begged her to do, that there was any reason on earth why they should not be happy. David had kept his word, and save for a look now and then, or an impulsive handclasp, had not betrayed the towering emotion that was in him. The impression made upon him by her tragic life story had been tremendous. And that part of her life which she had withheld from him—the reason why she considered it hopeless for him to love her, the sword of threat which Benton Wood held over her head—troubled him and teased him, at the same time imbuing Jane with a greater mysticism, so that his love for her now was comprised of all the elements of love—understanding, pity, admiration, curiosity, and desire.

David watched her as she lay there, looking up into the sumac tree. The upward curve of the chaise longue lifted her body into a line of exquisite sensuousness. Her kimono was bound tightly about her legs, in the Japanese fashion, the heavy silk following of its own accord the curves and depressions of her body. Her head was thrown back, the delicate chin lifted, the delicate throat outlined against the dusk. Her hands were at her sides.

"She is like a lovely mummy," said David to himself, "like the lovely perfumed mummy of some girl from Cairo, killed by a queen because her beauty made a king too restless!"

Just then Jane lifted her hands to her hips and dropped her chin forward, regarding for a moment her feet, which stretched out in front of her.

"Lord, what is it she looks like now? A vase! That's it! A tall, curved, beautiful amphora, rocked from its place by earthquake somewhere, some time, to lie for a thousand years under a dozen cities, yet bearing no trace of

ruin or of age beyond a subtle quality of memory. That's what she is, a jar of mysteries!"

Here Jane sat up and looked at him, turning sidewise and leaning forward on her hands.

"Are you looking at me?" she questioned accusingly.

"Looking at you?" he retorted. "You—you body of a king's despair! You potpourri of destruction! What did you expect me to be occupying myself with? Sketching the watering-pot, or weeding the petunias? Would you like to know what you look like right now, as you sit there? Well, you look like the Sphinx when she was a girl! It's wicked for a woman with yellow hair to have eyes like yours—long eyes the color of an iceberg, that almost slant up at the corners, and have blue shadows above them, and thin black brows. It gives you a look of wickedness, my dear, a sinister fascination, that you have no idea of. At least—well, oh, Lord, I suppose you have, too!"

"Anyhow, let's change the subject," he finished, laughing, though, as a matter of fact, something in Jane's face had warned him not to go on. "Do you know they say there is a secret passage under this walk—running directly under it, from the house to the fence in the back? Whether you get out of the passage and go through the gate, or whether the passage leads through into the next street, I don't know."

"Indeed?" said Jane.

"Yes," David continued for want of something to do. "The history of this house is very interesting. At least, it interests me. It seems so—so sort of conservative now. Maybe that's because I live in it. I'm afraid I'm not very radical," he laughed a little at himself. "They say it used to be a house of doubtful reputation—a sort of place of assignation. Did you ever hear of that?"

Jane did not answer at once. She was

reaching for a cushion which had fallen from her chair to the grass.

"No," she said at length. "Is that true?"

"Well, I can't really say whether or not it's true. I don't suppose I believe it really. Especially as I've never come upon any indication of the mysterious passage they tell about, through which women are said to have made their escape when the place was raided. And you lived here, too, you see, at one time, and never knew of it. But of course there's no reason why it shouldn't have been true. This was a bad district some years ago. The same story is told of several of the houses."

Jane looked about the lovely garden.

"It seems impossible," she murmured.

She rose suddenly.

"I'm tired," she said.

"Well, I'll be darned!" cried David for the first time noticing the obi of her kimono. "You might be one of them yourself!"

Her face went white, and she caught at the back of the chair.

"One of whom?" she whispered.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, one of the ladies who used to grace this garden. You've tied your obi in the front, child, like a geisha girl, a Japanese light-o'-love! I say, what's the matter? Jane!" He stepped forward quickly and took her in his arms.

She broke from him with a shriek.

"Don't touch me! Don't touch me!" She slunk away from him, her eyes fastened on his face, tearing at the obi. "Don't ever touch me again!" she moaned, edging toward the steps. Suddenly, with another shriek, she fled up the steps and into the house.

Just at that moment the doorbell rang. David went mechanically into the hall, to answer it. Jane was at the top of the first landing, peering down, her eyes blazing like the eyes of a cat.

Opening the door, David admitted Dicky Webb.

CHAPTER XV.

"A bit of bread and some nice, cool milk, perhaps?"

"No, thank you, Mrs. May," said Perry politely.

"Then surely you'll be eating the pretty yellow custard I baked for you. All hot from the oven it is this minute. I'll be bringing it up for your eyes to see. One look, and I'm saying you'll eat it."

Mrs. Mayhew, the large, motherly woman employed by Benton Wood to take charge of the child which the law had given him, gave one final pat of her thick, soft hand on the curly, dark head of Perry Pierce, and rose laboriously to her feet.

"I'll be returning before you know it, my darlin'," she said.

"Please, Mrs. May, I can't—I don't wish to see the piece of food," said Perry. He was lying in bed, where he had spent many lonely hours since he had been brought there three days before.

With a gesture of helplessness, Mrs. Mayhew turned again to the bed.

"But, my precious!" she expostulated. "You've not eaten enough since you've been here to keep a small bird alive. I haven't a thought of what to be doing for you. You'll never be a man at this rate, child." She crossed the room again and leaned over the bed coaxingly. "Come, sonny," she said, "your father said I was to make you eat, whether you're wanting it or not. But I can't make you swallow, and I wouldn't. Food that's not relished never does a body good. But your father's gone out now to see if he can find a doctor for you, who'll be giving you nasty medicine that's worse nor custards, if you don't eat. Your father said——"

"My father is dead," said Perry.

"Holy Mary!" cried Mrs. Mayhew, and crossed herself quickly. "I'm hoping he's not! You're sick, dearie, and

had better go to sleep. The doctor will be coming in a minute. What's the matter? You're not crying again? There, that's better. Well, I'm leaving you now, to do my work. But before she goes, can't Mrs. May get you something? He says you're to have anything you want."

"I want my mother," answered the child calmly.

Then suddenly Perry began to cry. He threw down the covers and, crawling to his knees, beat the bed with his weak little fists, sobbing his heart out and crying over and over:

"I want my mother! I want my mother!"

Mrs. Mayhew, recognizing for the first time in the unusual child something she could understand and sympathize with, hurried to the bed to take Perry into her arms and comfort him. Mrs. Mayhew was not, however, what Perry wanted. For a moment he clung to her; then flung himself free and dropped back onto the bed, where he began again to shake and sob, pounding with his fists as before, Mrs. Mayhew talking to him continually in a soothing, affectionate undertone.

Slowly he became quieter, until, after a series of little short gasps, he lay quite still. Mrs. Mayhew, however, continued her caressing monologue, finally questioning him as to whether or not he was asleep. And, much to her astonishment, Perry answered her, in his customary polite, proud voice:

"Don't talk to me any more, now, please, Mrs. May. I'm—I'm finking."

After Mrs. Mayhew had gone downstairs, Perry decided that he felt hot, and that a bed was not a place in which to think. So, stepping to the floor, he took from a chair beside his bed his warm blue bathrobe, which he had worn on the porch of his school infirmary. And after getting into it, and tying the cord carefully about him, he walked to one of the windows overlooking the

deep, hedge-bordered yard which ran from the house to the street, and a slightly slanting porch roof with clusters of ramblers sticking up here and there over the edge.

Perry remained on his knees before the window for nearly an hour, staring at the patch of road running past at the far end of the yard. It seemed very quiet, only an automobile now and then, or a rattling team, passing the house. The road, a few miles out of New Rochelle, was a secluded one.

Then Perry saw one of the automobiles stop before the house, and knew that the doctor must have come. He left the window and climbed into bed, still wearing his dressing gown. He heard Mrs. Mayhew open the door in answer to the bell. This told him that Mr. Wood was not with the doctor. Perry was glad.

Mrs. Mayhew was speaking.

"Good morning to you, sir," she said. "You're the doctor?"

"Yes," answered a very nice voice. "You will take us to the patient, please."

"The lady, too?" asked Mrs. Mayhew. "Oh, I see, sir. She's—"

And then came a voice all clear and completely filling the air, which seemed to run right up the rambler bushes, over the roof to the window, and into the room, flooding every corner with radiant light of sound.

"I am the nurse," it said. And Perry leaped to the floor with a shriek.

"Mother! Mother! Up here! Up here!" And the next moment he was in Jane's arms, halfway down the steps.

While David was trying to calm the faithful dragoness with sounds and gestures and smiles, Jane ran upstairs for a blanket and, wrapping it warmly about her son—at his wish leaving his arms free to cling about her neck—she picked him up and carried him downstairs.

She passed Mrs. Mayhew successfully and was stepping out upon the porch, followed by David, when she

found herself, for the first time in months, face to face with Benton Wood.

"Well, well, well! Going so soon?" he said, smiling unpleasantly in Jane's face. "So you're going to leave me, Perry, and go off with another nice gentleman? Well, perhaps he has a better right to you than I have. How 'bout that, Jane? Is this his father? Or don't you know?"

Only Dicky Webb, walking about beside his taxi, waiting, saw clearly what happened then.

"Well, watch dat!" he said half aloud admiringly. "Youse needn't tell me he got *dat* one out of a book!" He hurried up to inspect the prostrate figure at the foot of the steps, over which David was bending. "I guess you winged 'im, boss—you an' de concrete," he commented approvingly. "I bear youse no grudge," he added, holding out his hand, "but I don't mind sayin' I had a peach on ice for 'im myself!"

CHAPTER XVI.

"Well, Dave Morley, what in the world have you there?"

Doris Bailey, answering her doorbell at about seven o'clock on Monday evening, found David standing on the step with Perry asleep in his arms.

"A child," David replied, "that I want you to take into the bosom of your family and board and keep and care for for a while."

"Well, *Dave*! I'm thrilled to death! Don't go and tell me it doesn't belong to you!"

"It does belong to me. In a way. But of that more anon," he added mysteriously. "And let me tell you, the presence of this child in your house lays you liable to indictment and lays you open to assault and fills your days and nights generally with battle, murder, sudden death, and all sorts of excitement. Will you take him?"

"*Will I!* Just watch me open my

arms! Do I have to hide him and lie about him and keep him from everybody?"

"Everybody except his mother, the woman I am trying to marry. I'm bringing her over later, if you'll let me, to see you."

"Will I let you! Oh, and, Dave, may Charlie know we have a little fairy in our home, or must I keep the secret even from him?"

That night, after they had come back from across the street, and Jane was quiet in her room upstairs, David got together in the library all the material he had at hand which could be of service to his sister, Ethel Morley, in her approaching trial. He had postponed the matter until the last moment, having entirely disregarded it since his return. At first the necessity for the recovery of Jane's child had swept from the horizon all other considerations. And later Jane herself had come to fill his mind to the exclusion of everything else.

The opening day of the trial, for which David had been called as a witness in behalf of his sister and also of the other four delinquents—three men and a woman, who were now out on bail under a similar indictment—would be that coming Thursday. It was imperative that he be present, and also that he have by him in clear and decent form whatever testimony for the defense he should be able to get together. He had known all along that he must leave on the night train Tuesday—he had made his reservations when he had got into New York Friday morning—but he had kept the thought out of his mind as much as possible, so reluctant was he to go.

Meanwhile, saying nothing about the matter to Jane, he had taken her case in detail, suppressing, however, all names involved, to a lawyer in town whom he knew personally and whose

judgment he valued. As he had surmised, the case against Benton Wood was a serious one, and he had every assurance of an easy victory for Jane without the necessity of making public or even bringing into court at all whatever might be those facts of her life which she had consistently, from the first, shown an unwillingness to disclose. He should not, as he very early saw, be able to attend to the matter fully until his return from his second visit to Chicago.

He had also made inquiries from every possible source, as it seemed to him, concerning the actual whereabouts of the child, failing utterly to discover anything of use to him. And the recapture of Perry had been an unlooked-for factor in the events of the week. He was happy that he need not leave Jane to agonizing doubts and conjectures as to the boy's welfare.

But supreme among all the thoughts that crowded his mind as he sat at the table to-night, cataloguing, comparing, and memorizing, was that incomprehensible scene with Jane in the garden the evening before. He could find no explanation which would satisfy him of her curious conduct. He knew that she had had a child by a man to whom she had not been married, but she had told him all about this before and had not seemed to regard the matter, by itself, as of tragic importance. Nor had he shown any feeling on the subject which should warrant such an outburst later. He tried not to dwell on it, lest his thoughts stampede in his mind and he be unable to go on with his work at all. As it was, he had great difficulty in keeping his attention on the documents and letters before him. Constantly Jane's face would come between him and the page, as she shrieked and tore the shameful obi from her dress.

At four o'clock in the morning, he pushed the papers from him and went to bed. He had accomplished little.

At ten o'clock, Jane knocked at the library door. David turned over heavily and groaned. Then he got into his dressing gown and went unsteadily across the floor to open to her. She was wearing a plain blouse and the skirt of the suit in which he had just caught sight of her as she had flashed by him up the stairs a week ago. She had refused to have her trunk sent down to his address from Patchin Place, half through fear of being tracked and half, as David surmised, through an amusing vestige in her of conventionality and squeamishness, which had only endeared her to him the more. So she had been obliged to dress in Chinese and Japanese robes, supplemented by the few things which she had brought with her in her suit case. This was the first morning she had not taken her breakfast dressed either like a mandarin or a mikado, and the fact that she seemed to be shunning any reminder, even, of her kimono of the night before struck him at once, so that his awakening was as uneasy and troubled as had been his protracted falling asleep.

Her manner, however, was so matter-of-fact and friendly that it disarmed him.

"Breakfast is ready!" she said. "Hurry up! Your tub is drawn and everything."

Late that afternoon, she came again to the door and knocked.

"Come in!" he cried. At last he had got some real light on the matter in hand and was working furiously.

Jane spoke from the door.

"David," she said, "I know you'll think I'm wrong, and making a fuss about nothing. But the more I think of it, the surer I become that you aren't safe here. You broke his arm, you know. And he'd never lose a chance to bring a suit of assault against you. It isn't like him. He's spent his life doing just such little things, things that you'd think wouldn't interest anybody.

He enjoys them. And I know he'll have a warrant out for you just as soon as he can get around to it, if only to annoy you. And if they came for you to-day, it would mean you couldn't get to Chicago in time for the trial.

"I know it wouldn't be serious at any other time, and that you aren't afraid of being arrested, especially, and all that, but I know, too, how important it must be that you get to Chicago on time—you've told me yourself that your sister doesn't stand a chance of getting through without you—and I wish you'd go across the street to Mrs. Bailey's—or somewhere, some place where they wouldn't look for you. He's found out who you are, and you may be sure he knows where you live and everything. He's been down around here asking questions, of course, and people have seen me down here, and of course he's asked all about you. You really aren't safe here, David. I wish you'd go."

David looked at her with amusement. What she had just said seemed to him the most preposterous thing he had ever heard. He was amazed at her, who was usually clear-headed and logical.

"Jane dear," he said, "I'd do anything to please you. But I can't put this up now. I'm right where I'm getting hold of it. And if I pick these papers up now and cart 'em off somewhere, I'll get 'em all mixed up. And it's impossible that any such thing could happen as you have described. In the first place I don't believe he knows me, and and in the second place I'm sure he doesn't know where I live, and in the third place he's laid up good and fast for a good while yet."

"You can't be sure," Jane replied stubbornly. "It may not be so bad as you think—just bad enough to make a nasty little fuss about. I wish you'd go."

"Dear, I can't go. It would be foolish." He arose and, coming over to where she was standing, took her hands

in his. "You see, dear, if I did go, it would be just to please you, quite against my judgment, and I can't afford to waste a minute of time. You don't want me to do it just to please you, do you?"

She looked at him a moment, a curious, far-off little smile on her face.

"No, I guess not," she said, and put her hand on the knob of the door.

"But, David, there's one thing which needn't trouble you at all, and I do beg of you to do it. Put into your inside pocket right this moment the most important papers, and as fast as you get through with what you're working on, put those in your pocket, too. Don't, I beg of you, leave anything at all you are going to need scattered about on the table where you can't lay your hands on it at a moment's notice. If you can see no reason in that—then I do ask you to do that just to please me."

He laughed indulgently and, selecting several of the papers from the table, put them carefully into his pocket, while she watched him. Then she went out and closed the door.

At six o'clock, she brought him his dinner on a tray and set it on the rug outside the library door.

"Come get your dinner, David," she called. "Don't make a fuss, or *anything*! You have to eat sooner or later, and it's ready now, so come get it and eat it and save time."

Then she went back upstairs and took up her station where she had been sitting nearly all day, close by the window in the little hall bedroom overlooking the street. The window was raised from the bottom, and the curtain drawn completely across it. She had left the door to the attic stairway open.

She was aroused from a fitful doze by the sharp, strident ring of the door-bell.

She glanced out, drew in her head at once, and ran swiftly and silently down the stairs. She threw open the

door to the library and, rushing in, seized David by the arm.

"Come on!" she whispered. "They're here! Got your papers?"

"Who's here?" David looked up from the table without a glimmer of understanding in his face.

"The policemen! Two of them! David, *come*! They'll be in here!"

He arose and picked up the last of the papers from the table.

"I'm not packed or anything," he said, thrusting the papers into his pocket. "Where do you want me to go? Garden? They'd be expecting that and be around there in a minute, if they're not there already."

The bell rang again, more peremptorily.

"Come on, will you? I packed your bag. There's everything in it you'll really need, anyway."

He followed her up the stairs to the second floor, past the front door on which now a heavy boot had begun to pound, snatching up his hat and overcoat as he ran.

At the head of the flight, his bag was sitting. He grabbed it and followed Jane to the attic stairway.

"Where, for God's sake——" he began, then stopped, his hair rising on his head.

Halfway up to the attic, Jane had suddenly stooped over and lifted bodily from its place a portion of the flight of stairs, one step, together with the section leading down to the step below and that leading up to the one above.

"Come on!" she whispered fiercely. "Get down in there!"

She flashed into the opening a tiny bulb light which she held in her hand, and David got a swift glimpse of a narrow, sharply slanting floor with boards nailed across to supply a footing, very much like a slip leading down to a float, directly under and following the line of the other stairway.

He lowered himself into it without

a word and Jane followed him, fitting the stair into place above her.

CHAPTER XVII.

When David Morley returned from Chicago, a week later, to his house in Charlton Street, he looked haggard and old.

He had gone through the previous week like a man asleep and dreaming dreams of horror. After four days of rhetoric, altercation, and insult in the courtroom and outside the courtroom door, a hung jury had succeeded in postponing his sister's trial indefinitely. And as this was the second time the case had been tried and dismissed, there was every belief that it would not be taken up again.

David had come back to New York immediately. He had no plan of action beyond the intention of going at once to Benton Wood, who had been taken to a hospital in the city. This he had accordingly done. And he had had little trouble in proving his point to his blustering, but too obviously culpable host, and in obtaining from him the assurance of peace for Jane thereafter and no further attempts to molest the child. Benton Wood furthermore vouchsafed the unsolicited information that he was glad enough to be rid of the two of them, and that he wished David joy of his bargain.

"She ought to enjoy herself down there in Charlton Street, and especially in that house!" was his parting shot, knowing himself safe, in his present surroundings at least, from further injury. "Pleasant memories, you know, and all that! Better ask her about it!"

But it had not needed this. Clear in David's mind from the moment when she had left him at the subway station, an hour before train time, until this moment, when he stood fitting his key into the door of his house, had been the image of Jane as she had lifted the

seventh stair of the attic flight and flashed her light down into the gloomy passage.

She had not spoken a word as she had guided him down the three wooden inclines which, following the direction of the three flights of stairs above them, led finally into a low stone chamber under the house. From here, still without speaking, she had lighted his way into and along a low, horizontal passage spun across with many spider webs and smelling oppressively of sour mold and damp, which led straight under the garden and up into a tumbling, abandoned house in the next street, whose yard backed up against David's fence. Once, as they went, something had glittered on the floor ahead of them, which had proved to be a cheap, small garter buckle with a bit of pink elastic clinging to it. Except for this, their way had been uneventful.

"You'd better take the subway," Jane had said, speaking for the first time as they came out into the air. And she had gone with him to the King Street station.

"Jane, will you promise me to be where I can find you when I get back?" he had asked, only one thought being clear amid the horror and confusion of his mind—that he must go to her immediately upon his return.

"No," she had replied.

And he had said:

"Very well, then. They will have to do without me out there. I shall not leave until I have your promise."

At that she had given him her word to keep Doris Bailey informed as to her movements. The house in Charlton Street would be impracticable, naturally, for a few days, but she would be across the street continually to visit Perry. It had occurred to him at the time that her idea might be to go back to Patchin Place, which, as he had just learned from Doris, was what she had done.

He entered his house now, moving still as in a dream, drew a bath while he made him some coffee, bathed, and dressed, and went to find Jane.

She answered the doorbell without hesitation and led him up to her room.

"How did it come out?" she asked, courteously and gravely, seating herself on the bed and motioning him to the chair.

Her manner expressed an impersonality of attitude toward him almost of sufficient power to wrest from him the memory, even, that he had ever held her in his arms. But he clung desperately to this memory, and sat silent, gazing at the mouth he had kissed, the hand she had laid on his cheek, the arms she had clasped about his body, in order that he might draw from them the courage to approach her unresponsive eyes with the words he had come to speak.

And suddenly, quite without the mannerly little prologue he had intended, the thought which had been uppermost in his overburdened mind slipped and fell crashing into the room, like a stone from a load.

"Whatever your life has been, it's all my fault!"

And following this came all the rest, tumbling, impetuous, unassorted.

"I don't care what your life has been!" he cried. "It's you as you are that I love, and you as you are is you as your life has made you! I should bless your life, because it has made you what you are! I love you! I can't live without you! I can't work without you! I shall never be anything unless you come to me, and if you do come, there's nothing I sha'n't be able to do! Oh, my love!" He dropped on his knees before her and buried his face in her lap. "All the worst of it was all my fault!" He looked up at her, out of eyes tormented and old. "I wanted to follow you that night, six years ago

—and help you, and I didn't. Not because I thought I'd better not, or decided I wouldn't, or anything of the kind—but just because *it was a hot night, and I didn't have the energy to move!*" He groaned and hid his face in the folds of her dress.

"Oh, David!" she whispered pityingly, and laid her hand on his head. He turned his face at once and kissed her hand repeatedly, like a big, contrite dog, grateful for forgiveness.

"Oh, Jane, don't punish me forever! I've grown old in a week, wondering and doubting— If you refuse to let me love you and care for you—Oh, and be *with* you, beloved!—for something that happened *after* that night of my everlasting shame, you'll be killing me, dear! Just that. I know, because I know what this week has been. Jane, don't you see that no matter *what* you've done, your mind, in comparison to what I'm suffering, is full of *peace*? Because what you did, you did for a purpose. You were doing what you didn't want to do, and you knew why you were doing it. You were doing it for a helpless child. And I—I just did nothing. I just sat in a chair—stupid and lazy and aimless—and played with a high ball, and thought I would, and then thought I wouldn't, and wished I had, and then was glad I hadn't, and let you, the helpless child left in *my* care—for God knows it was nothing else, and any man with blood in his veins would have seen it—wander off into the night, and steal again, and steal again, and when the stealing wasn't good, try something else! Oh, when I think of you in that house, I go mad. Oh, God! Oh, merciful God! Oh, *Jane!*" He rose to his feet and staggered across the room, striking his fists together and rolling his head from side to side.

He stopped suddenly and put his hands out before him, his head thrown back, his eyes closed, his breath coming in short gasps.

"For God's sake, why don't you do something?" he called sharply.

"David! David! Sit down!" She pushed the chair toward him and forced him into it. "Oh, what is it, dear? What is the matter?" She looked into his face, terrified.

"It's nothing," he said, and was quiet for a moment, patting her hand.

"Jane, let's imagine," he said at length dreamily, "that we're out in a boat together, an old flat-bottomed boat, gathering water lilies, on a still pond—all alone except for an old man 'way at the other end, with a fishing rod, sitting motionless in the sun, his hat over his eyes, and dozing and never catching a thing. And now and then voices passing on the road, hidden by the trees, and you and I with our arms up to the shoulder in cool water, reaching down along the lily stems——"

A scream broke from her.

"David!" she cried. She shook him roughly. "Don't do that! You frighten me! David!" She threw her arms about him and tried to drag him to his feet. "Oh, David," she wailed, "I think you're going to die! That's all. That's needed now—for you to die!"

"Nonsense," he said, almost calmly, standing up and putting his arm about her. "Of course I'm not going to die—not for—not for a couple of days yet," he finished grimly. "I—I'm just sort of broken in pieces, dear, by all the thoughts I've been thinking. That's all. I'm all right now.

"Only the thing keeps going over in my mind!" he burst out again. "It's a circle—and you can begin anywhere—but you can't ever stop! It was because of me that you lived there, and because you lived there you aren't fit for me! It's false! It's a trick! But I can't make you see it! Oh, what difference does it make what's past? All we have now of life is just what's left of it! Why should we be unhappy till we die just because we've been unhappy

since we were born? Oh, Jane, what are we going to do?"

She came up to him and put her hands on his shoulders.

"We're going to be happy if we can," she said. "If I can make you happy, David, there will be no one so happy as I. I love you. And you love me. Perhaps, after all, that is all that matters. There are so many people who have everything else, but so few who have love. We will forget everything but that."

"We will forget everything but that!" he repeated, and caught her in his arms. "We will go away somewhere, and leave that house, and you shall forget completely that you ever lived there!"

She detached herself gently from him.

"I didn't live there, not really," she said, "until the house was done over and leased by Benton Wood. But it was just the same."

"What do you mean?" he shouted. "What could be just the same? Jane, don't torture me! Tell me what you mean! Tell me why you went there, and how you—you knew where to go, and—and, for pity's sake, how long you stayed! Oh, I've been wanting to ask you all these questions! I want to know everything!"

"Why, there's not very much to it," said Jane. "It was a perfectly natural thing." She clasped and unclasped her hands several times, looking out of the window. "You see, I didn't make a success of stealing. After that first time, I lost my nerve. I kept trying it, but didn't have any luck. And after a while we didn't have any food, and the baby was starving. He was all queer. So I thought I'd take him to the river and jump in with him. I didn't go to the East River, though I'd heard that was the sort of place for it; the Hudson was nearer, so I went there.

"You've no idea how hard it is to

drown yourself. I tried to get out on the docks, and there was always somebody watching there, and they sent me back, and once a policeman told me to move on. But at last I found a good place—not a soul around—behind a lot of beer cases piled up across one corner of a wharf. And I was just going to do it when I heard two men talking on the other side of the boxes, and it struck me all of a sudden, *'What if one of us shouldn't be drowned?'* What if the men should hear us splash and try to rescue us, and get me at once, and the baby after hours, or I should be drowned, and the baby should be left? Because I couldn't be sure of clinging to him till the very end.

"So I went away, and the men saw me and called, 'Oh, you cutie, been out lookin' at the moon?' I went to Washington Square and sat down in the park. And after a while a girl came up and sat down near me. And after a while she asked me what was the matter. And I told her. I would have told anybody; I didn't care. And she called me a poor kid and offered to lend me money; but I thanked her and said it would only make the difference of a day. She didn't say anything for a minute, and then she said she knew of—an easy job, if I wasn't too stuck-up about it. Some girls were, and I could leave the baby with her married cousin. So—so I did."

"And then?"

"And then—she took me there. The woman seemed glad to get me. She made me eat and drink—I suppose she drugged me a little—and told the girl where I was to go. And we started upstairs. And on the way she showed me the secret passage under the seventh stair, so that if the house should be raided, I'd know how to get away.

"Then——" Jane paused, and passed her tongue over her lips. "Then—it's curious," she apologized. "I can't seem to tell it."

"Oh, my God!" David turned from her and walked the length of the room.

"Anyway," she continued, "my—first appointment was with Benton Wood." She paused again. "Oh, I couldn't bear him!" she cried suddenly, and began to twist her hands. "When he came near me, I screamed. I hadn't realized it would be just like that! And I wouldn't let him touch me——"

"You—you what?" David whispered. "What's that you said?"

She went on without heeding him.

"And when he tried to—to come near me, I screamed, and he asked me what I was making such a fuss about. Then I told him I'd just come, and begged him to help me get out again, and when he laughed at me and came toward me again, I tried to throw myself out of the window. So then he saw I was telling the truth.

"That seemed to make him worse than ever. All of a sudden he went all to pieces, and began to—to sort of whimper and beg me to have pity on him, but I wouldn't let him touch me. And after a while he said he'd take me out of there if I'd come and live with him, and I said that would be no different from this. Then he said he'd marry me. It went through my mind in a second that if I married him, nobody need ever know about Perry—I didn't care, but I thought he might some day—and that he need never be hungry again. So I said all right, that I'd marry him, and then I let him kiss me.

"Then all at once it occurred to me that he might change his mind when he learned about Perry, and I didn't want to tell him. But I did. And when I told him that he roared, and I thought for a minute he was going to kill me. So I said, 'Please do. I want to die.' And then he became calmer and said he didn't care how many babies I had; he didn't care about anything if he could only have me where he could kiss me whenever he wanted to. So he took

me away. The woman saw me going out and tried to stop me, and he struck her, so she had to let us by.

"Then he married me—or I thought he did. Curious about that! But almost at once he began to hate me. On account of Perry, I suppose, and because he could see I didn't love him at all. And then he began to twit me about Perry and about where he'd first met me, and saying I thought I was better than he was, and had too many high ideas altogether, and would better get them out of my head. And when the house in Charlton Street was closed up and then done over, he bought it, and took me there to live. Pleasant fancy, wasn't it? First thing I saw when I went into my bedroom was a sign in the mirror reading, 'Lest We Forget!'

"Well, that's how it happened," she finished. "But it's just as bad as if it had been the other way. I intended to do it. I just hadn't the courage to go through with it."

"Jane! Jane! Oh, you poor little girl! Listen to me, dear." He led her over to the couch and sat down beside her there, holding her head back against his arm and gently smoothing the hair from her forehead. "You've got this all wrong, child. It's as far from the same thing as black is from white, or any of the proverbial opposites are from each other. It's unjust enough, God knows," he went on, "to judge a man by his deeds, to condemn him under human laws for the things he does when he's an animal again for a minute. That, however, I suppose, can't very well be helped. But to punish a man for the lie he didn't tell, the murder he thought better of committing, for hate turned to love, lust changed to pity, for his firm intention to give himself to sin, which, when confronted with the face of sin, became revulsion and sickness of soul—that is unthinkable. It can't be done. And if it should be done, every house on

earth would be a prison, containing from two to ten criminals and watched over by God alone, for there'd be nobody left outside to keep the keys.

"And, child, even if that were not true"—he turned her face so that he could look into her eyes—"there are other sins besides theft and the other big ones. There are blindness, cowardice, and indolence. And there are other virtues besides chastity and the other big ones. There is *purity*, which is no less important, and fearlessness. And there is also love."

He took her in his arms suddenly with a great passion of tenderness.

"You have suffered enough, dear heart!" he said. "Any one would say so. Any man, taken by himself alone and asked offhand, without a moment's hesitation would say so. And any twelve men"—he laughed happily and ran his fingers swiftly through his hair—"any twelve men, after twelve hours of retired bewilderment, sweetest love, would march right back and stand right up and say so!

"Oh, Jane, I haven't the slightest idea what I'm talking about! I just don't dare stop talking for a little while. Do you know what I mean? One of us has got to be a third person for a minute and rave on and on about nothing, while the—the other two of us just sit still and busily remember that people *don't* die from happiness, except—and this lets us out—when they are weak or sick or old! Dear—dear, put on something—your hat, or a shawl, or a curtain—and let's go out and throw money to kids and beggars! And see which of us can walk farthest without putting a foot to the ground!"

"I say, Perry, old man, do you *insist* on spending the summer in New York?"

It was some weeks later. They were sitting in the garden.

It was a warm afternoon, and the

hose, transformed into a fountain for a while, was showering the grass with glittering spray.

Perry had discovered that, by drenching himself thoroughly in the process, he could get through the sheet of water into a little tent inside, which was very cool and almost dry. Here he had sat for some time, like a happy little frog, looking out at his mother and David, and watching the sun make colors on the mist. Just now he was earnestly engaged in filling the depressions in the flagstones with water from the watering-pot.

"What do you say to going to the

seashore, old chap, where you could be as wet as anything all the time? Your mother and I are going. Somewhere along the Penobscot Bay, perhaps? It's too hot for Japan!"

"That would do very nicely," said Perry.

Mr. Pritchard, their neighbor, stood aside from the bathroom window to give his wife a chance to look.

"Who's that pretty woman down there in the garden with Dave Morley?" he said.

"His wife," replied at once Mrs. Pritchard, who always heard everything first.



ROSEMARY

FOR the sake of some things
That be now no more
I will strew rushes
On my chamber floor,
I will plant bergamot
At my kitchen door.

For the sake of dim things
That were once so plain,
I will set a barrel
Out to catch the rain,
I will hang an iron pot
On an iron crane.

Many things be dead and gone
That were brave and gay;
For the sake of these things,
I will learn to say,

"An it please you, gentle sirs,"
"Alack!" and, "Well-a-day!"

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY.



The Laugh of Waters

By Charles Saxby

Author of "The Temple Girl," "Saving Regine," etc.



WITH a languid flick of the ashes from his cigarette, Ismail Bey smiled from his cushions at the woman opposite.

It was a dangerous sort of smile, coming from a man, for there was in it a subtlety that passed beyond the normal bounds of masculinity. His eyes, half veiled by heavy lids, full, intensely black, gleamed with a certain gorged satisfaction, like that of a cat almost tired of playing with a mouse, yet with no intention of permitting its victim to escape.

All about them was the silence of the superheated night, so intense that it seemed one could almost hear the shadows of the arches slipping imperceptibly across the courtyard; a sense of tremendous and vacant distances pressing in upon the walls; for sky a dome of infinite purple, from which the stars hung like golden lamps; and the center of it all that Arabian house, like a huge honeycomb of stone, filled with a hush as of an almost terrible listening.

To the woman, its windows, all turned in upon itself, like the thoughts of a person jealously self-centered, might have been so many ears; the upper rows of fretted arches were like mouths silently agrin with a jeering delight. The whole place might have been poised above a very abyss of lis-

tening, and against it the only sound tinkled out in a magnified enormity, sharply real, like the sole substance in a world of mirage.

From directly beneath them it came, striking up into their nerves through the rugs and cushions scattered on the top of the high, six-sided stone cistern. It should have been the most delightful sound of all in that land of arid drought—the bubble of a stream of water falling, from a height of many feet, into a walled-in recess below. Like a laugh of refreshment, it stole across the stillness of the courtyard, over which a low moon, reddish and huge, shed a light of brooding beauty; a tiny stream, babbling of things cool and green and desired, with every now and then a pause, followed by an added spurt and gurgle, as if in secret enjoyment of some tremendous joke. And all around it the house, supposedly sunk in sleep, seemed to lean on its elbow and hush its breath in that horrible suspense of listening.

To Ismail came an added relax of his heavy limbs; across his eyes, though they did not cease from their hidden watchfulness, crept an increased film of sleepy pleasure as he spoke:

"Diane."

"*Que voudras tu?*"

"That you sing to me, if you will."

"You have but to ask."

There was a gesture as she answered—a ripple of her shoulder, accompanied by a little clash of the jewels on her arm and a smile of fixed intensity. Ismail gazed at her with an ungrudging admiration—a slight woman, ash blond, with gray and narrow eyes of a singular steadiness; a woman of that deceiving slinness, really full-fleshed and supple, which the French term "*fausse maigre*," a disturbing woman—to one who would permit himself to be disturbed by women, as did, for instance, those strange men of the so-called Christian nations; a woman of a certain purely Latin exquisiteness, whose pale poise, under the jeweled glow of the lantern above her, stood out against that half-barbaric background with an effect of almost hectic civilization.

Taking up the thread again with the lazy ease of uncounted leisure, Ismail spoke once more:

"Then I do ask it, *ma belle*. No, no," he murmured, as she reached for a guitar and thrummed a chord on its strings. "Not one of those eternal things of the country. The others can give me those, and even better than you can."

"They are born to those things—the others," she replied with an impudent pout toward the women's quarters.

"That is exactly why I like you to be different."

"I thought that perhaps you felt—Arabian—to-night."

From under his lids, Ismail bent a glance upon her as if he expected to detect a hidden meaning back of her words, but the gray gaze met his in a steady mockery. His lids drooped again in a satisfaction even more full fed. Diane was really rather wonderful; he had never regretted the bargain he had struck with her when he had married her in Paris, two years before.

She had been thinner then, as had so many of the Parisiennes in those days of war—thinner, and beneath the laugh-

ing, gold-specked gray of her eyes there had been a hunted look, which had, perhaps, been the reason for her acceptance of the port of refuge he had offered. And he had had much to offer at such a time, he, Ismail Bey, well known on the boulevards from his visits of many years, backed by a legend of *l'or à Gogo* and a marble palace somewhere on the shores of the Persian Gulf. He had offered her palms, sunshine, the song of bulbuls, jewels, and slaves to wait upon her in an establishment of Oriental luxury with European liberty; and Diane, still exquisite in the remnants of a pre-war gown, had been growing daily thinner and more hunted.

Who she had been, Ismail neither knew nor cared. She had charmed him, and that was all he required of a woman. As to what she was going to be after her marriage to him, he could attend to that, once he had her behind the walls of that house. He was attending to it now, even as she reclined there, fingering the strings of the guitar.

"It is when I am most Arabian that I like you to be most as you are, *ma mie*," he smiled. "Sing me one of your own songs, that one I like so much."

"You mean 'Madelon?'" she suggested languidly.

"No, not that. The other one—about the girl crying for her lover."

There was a silence, in which came again that added spurt and bubble of the water falling beneath them, that laugh of a tiny stream falling from a height. To Ismail, to the whole house at that moment, the great and delicious wonder was as to just how many feet that water might be falling before it lost itself in the surface of its own accumulations. He could picture that surface, invisible in the blackness of the cistern, to be perceived by the feelings alone—if there should be any one to feel it—creeping slowly upward with

an imperceptible, but remorseless, steadiness.

Noting Diane's hesitation, masked under the pretense of an attempt at memory, Ismail's tongue crept out, like a red rodent, licking at his lips in a furtive pleasure.

"It goes so," he suggested, humming the air, marking time with a lazy motion of his hand:

"He is my love,
Give him to me."

Across her face came a flash of recollection, too vivid to be quite real, and she gave a little laugh at her own stupidity.

"Ah, you mean 'Le Berger.' I should think you would be tired of that stupid little song, I have sung it so often—of late."

"Not too often for me," he answered, and she laughed again with a metallic lightness.

She struck the guitar, her voice filling the courtyard with a husky sweetness aided by all the impertinent tricks of stage training. It was a simple little song, its lightness almost an affront in such a place, under that flood of moonlight, with its mingled suggestions of seduction and menace. Some cry of blood and passion, some wail of the tragedy of sun and sand, mingled with the flame of a faith implacable as the desert itself, would have been more appropriate in that courtyard, while hers was the voice of sheer Paris, crying in the wilderness.

"Ah, s'il est dans votre village,
Un berger sensible et charmant—"

"A shepherd," Ismail murmured, as she finished the verse. "That reminds me, *par exemple*. That young American who came here from service with the British at Basra—I have not seen him for three days. A Shepherd, too, no? Such strange names these people have! What, then, has become of him?"

"Perhaps he is—gone," Diane an-

swered, bending low over the strings of her guitar.

"Gone, without even a word to us, after we had received him, à l'Euro-péen, in our house?"

"It would seem so, for I have not seen him, either."

"For three days," Ismail finished for her, as she stopped. He made a gesture of fine contempt. "These English and Americans, they have no manners! For myself, I do not care. It is of you that I think, for you were—kind to him, no? Let us forget him, then. That refrain once more, *chérie*; it always enchants me. As you sing it, I can see that girl wandering in charming dishevelment, crying for her lost lover—her lost shepherd. Ah—such a sweet sadness!"

By his side stood a great earthen jar from which sprouted a growing lotus. He bent over it, inhaling its fragrance, half sweet, half strangely tragic in its suggestion. He gave a sigh of delicious sorrow. Ismail was a connoisseur of emotions; that was the best of it—that he always felt things so. He could play upon himself as upon some exquisitely sensitive instrument, extracting what emotions he pleased from any situation, without in any whit altering his own purpose in it.

Never, perhaps, had he so prolonged an ecstasy of emotions as in these last three days, with Diane, that listening house, and that laugh of water beneath. As the course of war will often bring the name of an unknown hamlet to the lips of all the world, so the turning in of that tiny stream, from the great rain tanks on the roofs, had made of the disregarded old cistern the core of the whole place.

Exactly how old the house was no one knew, but possibly for centuries the cistern had stood there, jutting out from an angle of the courtyard like a six-sided monolith, so familiar as to be almost forgotten. It had been Diane

who had, so to speak, rediscovered it. As soon as she had seen it, just outside her own apartments, its top arched over by the gray-green fronds of a date palm, she had demanded it as her private tower. The hint of mystery in the trapdoor in its top, the crazy ladder that led down from it into the blackness below, had been additional charms. A filagree balustrade, enveloping netting against the plague of flies, and some strips of gay awning, had made the change. Now the old cistern had become a silken turret of gay reconnaissance, secure from the eyes below, upheld over the delightful shiver of its own depths.

With a long-drawn inhalation of the lotus perfume, Ismail spoke again:

"I fear lest I tire you, Diane, but that refrain once more, I beg of you. There is something strange about that air. It brings out the tones of your voice as no other song."

Pressing a petal of the lotus to his lips, he listened dreamily as her voice rang out again in obedient compliance:

*"C'est mon ami, rendez le moi!
J'ai son amour, il a ma—"*

Then came the twang of a broken string, the rending of it reproduced in her throat as she stopped suddenly, pressing a handkerchief to her lips as if she suspected blood upon them. From across the jar of growing flowers, Ismail looked at her in mild dismay.

"Ah, tchut! Broken again? How strange! That has happened so many times of late when you sing that song, and always just at those words—'He has my faith.'"

"The fingering changes there," she replied. "It is this terrible dryness," she went on hurriedly, pressing her hands to her throat, where a pulse beat visibly beneath its pearly surface. "It dries the strings so—and the chords of my voice."

"It is trying at first," he nodded in sympathy. "But when you are more

accustomed, you will find the dryness good. Nothing ever decays here, not even the dead—unless they happen to die in water. Then, of course, they swell, and— It is very disgusting," he finished with a gesture of apology as he noted her swift pallor.

"Ismail—I beg of you—don't!"

"You are nervous to-night, my Diane."

There came an appeal about her, a deliberate softening, an effect of moving closer toward him.

"Yes, I am nervous. Ismail—it is that horrible old Feridjeh who makes me so."

"Feridjeh? Has she, then, dared to be insolent to you?"

"No, no. It is only that she is always so about me, every moment of the day and night—always so watching me."

"But I told you, back in Paris, that it would be necessary for you to have a woman attendant."

"Yes, I know, and I am willing. Of course I must have a maid. But Feridjeh is so ugly. Could you not give me that Somali girl, instead, or perhaps that woman Kennieh?"

"They would not do," he answered decisively. "The Somali is too young, and Kennieh is too light. You must be guarded here, Diane—for your own safety, I mean. The other women would be only too glad to have a scandal against my Feringi wife, and with Feridjeh at your side, there can be no question. She is faithfulness itself."

"Faithful, yes; but to you—or to me?" she muttered with a smile a trifle too wide.

"You surely do not think that I am betraying my promise to you, Diane?" he asked, almost pleadingly. "I told you that you should have your liberty to receive your European friends here, even men. Did I not permit you to receive this Monsieur Shepherd?"

"Yes, yes, you have kept your word,"

she said hurriedly. Then came a shudder that rattled the jewels again on her arms and throat. "It is not Feridjeh that is really the matter with me. It is the sound of that water below. I hear it even in my sleep—when I do sleep. Night and day, always falling—falling—— Ismail, can you not stop it?"

There was a disorder about her, creeping out through the repressions of her tone and gestures, staring from her eyes with an effect as startling as that of some painted window suddenly flung open, revealing a distraught face gazing out from behind it. She shivered rattlingly again as Ismail caught at her wrist, stroking it with fingers of practiced sympathy.

"Poor Diane, you are feverish to-night. It was for you that I had that water turned on, my love," he soothed. "The hot weather is upon us, and you remember how you suffered last year. It will be cooler for you when the cistern is full, and there will be no sound of the water then. You can even lift the top and lie here looking down into it and imagining things floating on its surface.

"Or no—perhaps it would be better for you not to lift the trapdoor, Diane mine. I had it padlocked so that you could not, and I will tell you why."

He droned lazily on, stroking her quivering wrist, holding her eyes, now wide and afrighted, with his own dreamy gaze.

"It is more than forty years since the old cistern was last filled. There was no occasion for it, until you came. I was not much more than a child then, but I remember how my father had the water turned in, and how we all listened and rejoiced in its laugh, even as we do to-day. There had been a man at the house, a wandering Feringi, something like this Shepherd, only this one was English. He had left suddenly, and none had known what had

become of him. There were some, indeed, who said afterward that they had thought they heard sounds from inside the cistern, but they imagined it might be some jinni. Our people are ignorant, you see. Then again, the cistern walls are thick, and some said it was just the water bubbling.

"He must have opened the trapdoor and fallen in and hurt himself, but it would have made no difference how strong he had been, for the trapdoor was padlocked, and his strength would only have prolonged his agony. The first we knew of it was when the cistern was full to the top. Then we heard a knock-knock-knocking against the under side of the trapdoor, and there—it was horrible to see; it was then that I learned how they look who die in water—there he was, floating on his back, his rigid, upstretched fists knock-knock-knocking on the trap——"

Diane's hand tore itself from his light grasp. There was a sobbing croak as she sprang up, then crumpled backward among her cushions.

For a few moments, Ismail gazed at her with a genuine wondering pity—the pity of a cat that has dealt too hard a blow and gazes in sorrow that a mouse should be so frail. Then he raised his voice:

"Feridjeh!"

She came, with a slap of bare, flat feet upon the tiles of the balcony—a woman tall as a man, and so gaunt that it gave one a purely scientific wonder as to the outlines of the frame beneath the bundled folds of her haik; a hawk-like face, from which her eyes glared out as if lit by fires of grudge for her own unattractiveness; a sort of walking skeleton, kept alive by a passion of resentment against her own sex. And she would keep Diane alive, too, as Ismail knew, that that passion might be full fed.

"Attend to your mistress," he ordered.

"You have not killed?" she asked, hovering over the fallen form in disappointment.

"I know of no reason to, nor does any one else," he answered sternly. "Remember, Feridjeh, every tenderness."

When alone again, he relapsed upon his cushions, staring up at the disk of the moon, from which the whole house seemed to hang, shadowy and spectral, suspended by silver rays over that abyss of listening. He could feel that listening all about him, first in the expanse of this larger courtyard and its enveloping combs of countless, useless rooms; then from the smaller courtyards beyond, given over to the women and servants, like holes eaten out of the fabric of the house by the cancerous jealousies of their occupants.

All was sunk now in a hush so intense that the laugh of the falling waters came once more with that sense of being the only reality in a phantasmal world, obtruding itself almost with the sharpness of a different substance, like an actual pain striking into the mazes of a dream.

Three days now it had been falling, a tiny thread, but so inexorable, its accumulations creeping slowly upward, perhaps a foot a day—about up to a man's waist by now. In three days more it would be six feet. Of course, one could climb a few feet up the ladder, but then what man could cling even to a ladder for six days of that hopeless blackness?

Ismail sighed again in a wondering, almost tender regret at the limitations of human strength.

II.

It is strange how impossible it seems, when anything decisive has happened, to put oneself back to things as they were before. The last three days had brought such a shift of interest to Is-

mail and all his household that it required a distinct effort to recall the incidents that had led up to it.

He made the effort, lying back on his cushions with an occasional deep puff of smoke at the moon, now white and blighting through the tracery of palm fronds overhead. He blinked up at it, full of that contentment which comes from the sense of being absolutely right.

He had kept his word to Diane in every particular. He had told her that his house at Lahej was in sight of the British residency. That, in those marvelous airs, one could see a building thirty miles away, and that Lahej lay across the frontier of a native sultanate, he had not thought it necessary to mention. Nor, when giving her liberty to entertain the Europeans there, had it seemed desirable to mention that none ever came to Lahej. Besides, one had come—this Shepherd.

Shepherd? It was characteristic of Ismail that, even at the thought of the man, the smooth contours of his face did not change. He had first encountered Shepherd four years before in Cairo, and had invited him to Lahej, should his wanderings ever take him in that direction. Had he been a European, Ismail would never have admitted him to the intimacy of the house. For an Englishman he might have done so, but an American was the safest of all, for where the English had a sort of social cowardice that kept them out of such affairs, these Americans had an inexplicable and ridiculous something that they called "chivalry."

That was very amusing, for it proved that Diane must have been the one first to open the doors of understanding between them. By what damnable cleverness had she circumvented the jealous eyes of that house? Over what unspeaking channels had they managed to communicate with each other, even across his own presence?

A knot stood out between Ismail's brows as he went over again the details of his return, that afternoon three days ago, to the house, bulking white against the palms, mirrored in the blue pools of the lagoon edge, huge without, but within of that peculiar Oriental clutteredness. He felt again the gratefulness of the shadows of the gateway, the surprising hush of the courtyard inside—no afternoon chatter; no thud, from the women's quarters, of pestles pounding grain; not even the voice of old Hafiz, crouched in his corner, staring from fly-clustered, eyeless sockets as he shouted the verses of the Koran; only a murmur of bees among the flowers of the date palms; all else a sense of silence and hidden eyes; not ears as yet—those had not come until the turning on of that thread of water—just eyes, avid and jeering, watching unseen from behind half-closed shutters.

But most of all he remembered the strange look with which Massal, the doorkeeper, had greeted him. That silent, man-to-man gaze, in which all differences of station had been for the moment wiped out, had told him all. It had not needed Feridjeh's bony clutch on his arm or the putrid heat of her words and eyes. The only surprise of that had been the woman herself, for Feridjeh had always reminded him, till then, of one of those polelike tombstones in a Turkish cemetery, always decayed and leaning awry; but now the tombstone had come to life.

And Diane— Again came that admiration of her which had in it no abatement of purpose. How clever she must have been, for not even Feridjeh had really seen or heard anything! It had all been mere suspicion, though magnified to certainty—just the murmur of two voices where but one should have been; a furtive cry of horror at the discovery that all avenues of escape were blocked; then the squeak of

the trapdoor leading down to the concealment of the cistern depths, and an unconquerable pallor as she had faced the serving woman.

She had been admirable, too, as she had faced him—no fawning or silly attempt to disarm by unaccustomed seductions, just her wonted, languid self, with that gleam of half mockery behind her eyes, the only sign of it all, an added sharpness of her face, as if the structure of the skull were showing through the flesh. Of course she had thought herself undiscovered then, though the narrowness of her escape had still been upon her. Not until that evening had she really known, as they had lounged over their coffee on the transformed bower of the cistern top.

It was then that he had asked for the song which had so suddenly become his favorite—that song of the girl crying for her lost love, her shepherd. As she had sung it, there had come, in planned drama, the bubble of the water from beneath them. Then — Bah! Women were so transparent after all—clear as glass, for all their vaunted cleverness! Their attempts at concealments and diversions were disappointingly crude. Up till that moment, it had been all conjecture and probability, a delightful uncertainty which had prompted him to the whim of leaving the trapdoor unlifted. Actually to know too much was so often to spoil the real delight of a situation. But as he had explained the sound, and had smilingly shown her the outline of the padlock beneath the rug, surmise had become knowledge.

It was their eyes that gave women away so. They could control their lips and hands, they could order their speech, but even lowered lids could not hide those blades of horror and hate, those trapped desperations stalking behind them.

But what an actress Diane would have made, could she have continued

the career that the war had nipped in the bud! For three days now, he had witnessed such an unceasing performance as probably no other woman had ever given before. Three days and nights together on that gay tower; three days and nights of smiles, songs, and badinage, all about them the unseen audience of that listening house; three days and nights of sunlight or sheen of moon through the arching palm fronds overhead, of drenching perfume from the masses of date flowers, of warmth, color, perfume, silken rugs covering that locked trapdoor and all that was below it. And so it had been with Diane herself—jewels, rouge, smiles, and a lilt of music, while deep down within her—not even the hidden agony of the cistern could surpass hers. And it was all so slow—that was the best of it—slow as the upward creep of those black waters.

Best of all, perhaps, had been the hour alone which he had given her that afternoon, without even Feridjeh to interfere. He had known how she would use it; he had watched it all just as much as if his actual eyes had been upon it. Returning to the little bower from which she had gone for the moment, he had flung back the rug, and there, upon the unyielding surface of the padlock, had been the marks of her furious, unavailing attack; scratches only, scratches that might have been made with scissors, with that woman's weapon, a hairpin, or even with the tips of her own polished nails; just scratches, their very hopelessness and futility the proof of their desperation. He could picture that attack, the death of that wild hope, the ashen-faced abandonment of that last, despairing scratch, scratch with her own fingers.

But that lump of iron had been stanch; for a century or more it had held the gates of the house, and it was as Oriental as he himself and as impervious to women's attacks.

Ismail collapsed upon himself, almost spent with the exquisite satiety of emotions. It was all so pitiful, so like watching the struggles of some beautiful butterfly impaled upon a jeweled pin. It was so necessary, too; she must be taught, while he— Ismail sat up suddenly, surprised at the surging impulses brought by the thought of Shepherd—a blazing desire to tear open the trapdoor, to light the place, that he might glut himself with the sight of that white face gazing up from the depths, or possibly reach down, seize that throat with his bare hands, and squeeze—

He fell back again, amused and slightly proud of himself. Civilized as he was, he was still capable of that, then; he had not lost it, for all his travels and Western culture. That desire had come springing up, hot and vivid, from the desert itself, born of heat, intolerable skies, and fanatic faith. Admiringly he saw himself as boulevardier, cosmopolite, and primitive man, all in one.

Poor Diane, how could she ever have imagined that she could hope to cope with all that? The realization of his own many-sided strength brought a little wave of tenderness toward her. He remembered how she had hinted for a sail that afternoon, but he had not chosen to grant it while the novelty of watching her upon that cistern top had still been so delicious. She should have it on the morrow, a couple of hours or so in that birdlike boat he had imported for her and which she liked so much. She must hint for it again, though, for those transparently veiled hints with which women imagined that they were gaining their purposes without being detected were very amusing to him. It was all so childlike; it gave one such a sense of being a great and different creature, granting things not dared to be asked for openly.

Diane should have her desire, then—

a two hours' sail to the island, with Achmet for boatman and old Feridjeh to see that she did not fling herself overboard in some foolish, expiatory idea of joining her lover through the watery gates of death.

Two golden hours she should have, toward sunset, that she might dream of freedom, forget things for a little while, and return to him refreshed. He did not wish to break the butterfly; he wanted it perfect and beautiful, for the struggles of a maimed thing are without charm. It takes beauty to make the sight of pain a pleasure.

Women—how stupid they were, after all! Transparent as glass, provided one kept one's eyes clear of those sentimental, "chivalric" mists that blinded the men of the more Western races!

So Ismail mused, filled with the glowing sense of his own magnanimity and power, blinking up at the great white moon now sliding down the west like the dragging moorings of the approaching ship of day.

III.

It was already sunset when Ismail woke, the next afternoon, from a siesta unduly prolonged.

The breeze was strong, and the gulf, glimpsed through a high arch, showed ruffled to indigo, its horizon standing out sharply against the saffron sky. Far out gleamed a single sail, scudding before the wind across that invisible line which marked the boundaries of British waters. The breeze stole into the courtyard, too, rattling the palm branches overhead, raising a slight veil of golden dust, bringing a feeling of life and motion.

Chatter and the thud of pestles came from the women's quarters; there was the laugh of men, the voice of old Hafiz intoning his interminable verses. Ismail wondered sleepily at the change. Then the reason for it stole across his mind. A release of listening—that was it, for

in the clatter of the blown palm fronds, the sound of that falling water was no longer to be heard.

Diane and Feridjeh must be back from their sailing trip by now. Poor Diane! How women recognized their masters and how, in reality, they adored the arm of adamant! There had been softness and gratitude as he had smilingly bidden her go on her little holiday, a sort of unspoken prayer for forgiveness, a pleading to be taken back, a reluctance to leave him, too; he had actually had to bid her to go, for it was not fitting that his concessions should be refused.

He would take her back, for of all the women he had ever met, she intrigued him the most. No other could have so stood the torment of these last three days. There was stuff in Diane, enough to enable her to endure, but not sufficient to bring silly and useless revolt against his will. He would seek her now and seal her forgiveness by an unspoken release from being nailed to the cross of that cistern top.

A little dinner in her own apartments, kisses, possibly tears— They would be good, for tears softened women so, and there were still other emotions waiting to be experienced again.

Besides, it was probably over now, down below there, even with the help of the ladder. No man could cling for four days of darkness. He could picture the growing weight of fatigue as the hours dragged interminably by, the despairing clutch on the rotting rungs, the chill as the waters inexorably crept up to even that foothold—and the blasting contrast of Diane's voice, ringing gayly down from above, singing the song of the shepherd.

It had been wonderful while it had lasted, but it was over now. The whole house seemed to feel that. Now there would be silence again until the waters rose to the top and there came once more, after the lapse of forty-odd years,

that knock-knock-knocking of a dead fist upon the trapdoor.

Should Diane hear that, too, or not? That depended on herself.

It was like stepping into another world to enter Diane's suite, transformed with cool grays and dull gold into a sober French elegance. All this, and she herself as well, was his. He thought of the contrast of the other courtyards beyond, clamorous and gaudy, and of the black-eyed women in veils and paint who waited his bidding. He stood between two worlds, East and West, both meeting in himself, and he was master in both.

The silence of the suite surprised him, but then perhaps Diane was resting, and he walked more considerately. She should find that he, too, was not lacking in this "chivalry." From end to end he went, puzzled that neither she nor Feridjeh was to be seen. Had they not returned? The boat—could anything have happened? The breeze was strong, but then Achmet was a skilled sailor.

His eyes sharpened by growing apprehension, Ismail noted things that had so far escaped him, signs, tiny, but increasing into a heaped-up importance, as of a subtle disorder everywhere—the edge of a gown protruding from between the locked doors of a huge *armoire*; a shoe flung here, a garment there; gaps among the feminine trifles of the dressing table; a sort of strange emptiness in the air, coupled with lingering emanations as of a desperate haste.

Somehow it was those folds of silk between the *armoire* doors that disturbed him the most. They seemed to be shaking to and fro, as if stirred by a draft, but the room was airless and torrid, every door tightly shut, and the heavy shutters of the arched windows closed and bolted. That, again, was unusual, for Diane adored openness.

Yet the edge of that dress was certainly shaking; in fact the whole *armoire*, solid and heavy though it was, was trembling, and he caught a muffled sound as if some living thing were moving inside it. With a snarl of suspicion, he turned the key.

An animal—that was his first astonished impression—a great white and shapeless thing, writhing among a mass of garments and wadded quilts that silenced its movements. He sprang back as, with an added writhe, it rolled out upon the floor, contorting itself horribly. Then he saw, protruding from one end of it, a pair of human feet, bare, brown, flat, and ugly. With another snarl, Ismail slashed at the cords bound tightly about it.

It was Feridjeh's face that glared up at him from amid the mass of entanglements. Almost before he had remembered to loose the gag from between her teeth, his hands were about her knotty old throat, horribly hot with reeking sweat.

He knew. Even before she could speak, gasping out the words like spurts of unclean flame pumped by the pressure of his thumbs, he knew.

"Gone—fooled us all! Gone in the sailboat with that Feringi man, dressed in my clothes and veiled as a woman! She left a writing for you. Look on the table."

He saw it now, a sheet of Diane's gray paper, written on in her flowing hand, its faint perfume, its violet ink, like an added insult of gay mockery:

ISMAIL: Do not blame that poor Feridjeh. She fought well, but "my Shepherd"—*sensible et charmant*—was too strong for her old bones. And do not blame Achmet either, if he returns, for we have a revolver with which to persuade him, once we are past the island. How surprised he will be when "Feridjeh" puts aside her veil!

We are gone to freedom, and by the time you read this, we shall be in British waters, for there was a little something in your coffee to make you sleep long.

We love, yes, but he is not my lover. But that is a difference you will never understand. We go to his country, where the courts will set me free. Adieu.

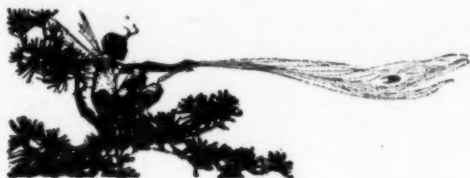
DIANE.

And then, with true femininity, the postscript, like violet fire burning itself into Ismail's brain:

Thank you for the compliment you paid me in believing so in my acting. But he was

really hidden in my armoire all the time, and was never in the cistern at all. D.

Outside, the breeze had dropped with the setting of the sun; the courtyard was once more hushed in a strange listening under the flood of blood-red light. Through it came again the mocking gurgle of that thread of water, as if in enjoyment of some secret joke.



UNVEILING

THEY burn above me in the night
And palely shine in day,
With cold, relentless ray—
Such masterful, strange orbs,
Their gaze my very soul absorbs,
So large and luminous and bright
In their sure insolence—and scant
Of all sane courtesies,
So that I watch all palpitant,
For fear my friends should see,
And, seeing—should surmise.
But yet they smile into my eyes,
And hold my hand so friendly-wise,
I know this cannot be.

Their love is mine to hold—and yet
I wonder—half in jest,
Half in a strange unrest—
If such things mirrored are
In some implacable pale star.

I wonder—if my friends should see—
How many will there be,
Of all who smile into my eyes
And hold my hand so friendly-wise,
Who will not turn from me?

LOLA RIDGE.



The Price of the Beautiful Thing

By Katharine Hill

Author of "Chameleons Up to Date," etc.

ANTHONY came back from Washington sooner than I had expected him. I had dined alone, and early, and was sitting with a book in the drawing-room when I heard the sound of his latchkey, followed a few moments later by a clink of glass in the dining room that I guessed meant a cocktail. Something held me motionless in my chair till he came to me.

"Look here, Marion," he said—with no more preliminaries than that!—"I want you to give me a divorce."

Once a workingman carrying a pole through the streets struck me with the end of it, by accident, on the side of the head. The pain was frightful, but what engaged my mind was the frantic and successful effort not to let any one see how I was hurt. I don't think I let Anthony see how he hurt me, either.

"I've been expecting this, Tony," I said, and I tried to make my voice frank and friendly. "It's Denise Duval, isn't it? I've thought for some time you were getting interested in her."

He was very red.

"Yes, it's Denise. This is playing it lower down on you than I ever expected to do, but the thing is there, and it's best to make no bones about it. Love is a thing—it's there or it isn't. You can't force it. And between Denise and me, it's there."

"I don't want you if you don't want to stay," and I put my hand before my mouth so that he shouldn't see my lips

tremble. "Since this thing's happened—I'm glad you told me at once. I don't blame you, Tony. And if the thing leaves me—sort of high and dry—well, there are lots of things in this world besides—love."

We had no heroics, no jealous outpourings of hate for Denise, of unwelcome passion for him! I must have succeeded in being reasonable and comradely, for that imploring, whipped-dog look passed out of his eyes, and he was soon talking naturally and confidentially to me about Denise and his plans. He rhapsodized to me about the girl!

"She's the most beautiful creature, isn't she? Those eyes of hers could draw a man's soul out of his body! She's like some wonderful witch woman out of the Middle Ages. She doesn't belong to to-day. And did you ever see such hair? So gleaming and heavy, like molten copper!"

"You know I haven't looked at her as much as you have." I achieved a faint smile. "I've only seen her a few times in your studio. She's certainly very beautiful and—not at all like an ordinary model."

"She isn't an ordinary model. She has a real gift for posing, and an artistic joy in serving the ends of art. And she's good, too."

He was off now on that theme. Denise was gentle, she was patient, she worked harder than any woman should.

Had he forgotten, I wondered, what stormy seas I had traversed at his side, when he had been poor and unknown and Poverty had made her home with us? Had he forgotten how we had fought and struggled together through the early years of our marriage, before recognition had come and brought plenty in its train?

"I want to shield her from all hardship—to take care of her and protect her."

His wide blue eyes appealed to me for sympathy. Did it occur to him that Denise could be cared for by him only at my expense—that to make room for her I must be thrust out of my safe shelter to struggle alone, a woman past her first youth, trained to no means of breadwinning? He saw himself, no doubt, providing amply for me, but the principle of alimony has always seemed to me an infinitely degrading one for the woman. Whatever he had had of me in the past, he had had as a free gift, though the conditions of the giving had made it necessary that he feed and clothe me. (And how he had fed, how clothed me, poor Anthony!) When the gifts were no longer prized, all returns for them must cease as well.

If we ever come up before a judge to account for our sins, I think Anthony will find a black score against him for that evening's blindness. He might have dealt his blow and gone away. Instead, he stayed talking, talking about this new spring of happiness that had come to him, and I must have played my part well, for he said, after hours of this:

"You are a brick, Marion! There's no one like you. I wonder how many women— But I reckon the truth of it is love's young fire has rather burned out in you, too, after thirteen years."

I loved his hands, his hair, his voice, his coat, his tobacco pouch, whatever he touched. I said:

"Well, you know, Anthony, I'm

thirty-three years old, and at my age that sort of thing does begin to seem rather silly."

The old, old, barefaced lie! Men made it, to salve their consciences when they leave women for girls, and most men believe it.

Relieved, he went on:

"It's different with a man, I guess. I'm older than you are, and I tell you, Marion, I never felt anything for you to touch what I feel for—"

The other part of me, the real me, broke away from control at that, and I heard myself—yes, shrieking at him:

"No, not that! Don't say that! Give her everything else, give her now—I'll stand back, I won't say a word—but the other is mine—"

I got hold of myself again. I had gone over to him and caught his shoulder. The glass over the mantel showed me my face—yellow-white, the mouth opening and shutting. Anthony was looking at me very queerly. I tried to laugh.

"You see, I am romantic, after all," I said. "About my own youth. We *did* love each other, Tony, and just because it's burned out, we mustn't say it never existed. I will not let you run down our Arcadia, even if you think you've found a better one with Denise."

But I could not give him back his unruffled confidence. He looked worried and fumbled for words. He blurted out at last:

"If it wasn't— You see, it's like this—I took her to Washington with me, and she's in love with me, and it's up to me to do the square thing by her."

When at length he left me, I crouched down close to the fire, feeling old and cold, and aching in all my body as if I had been beaten. I waited till the sounds in the flat told me that Anthony had gone to bed, and then I stole softly down the hall to the studio.

He was using Denise Duval's face

and figure in a picture he had now almost finished, of Lilith and the Snake in the Garden of Eden. It had impressed me disagreeably the last time I had seen it, but I felt now a feverish need to look again at the presentment of the woman who had stolen what was mine, who had lain in Anthony's arms.

The picture was all misty blues and lavenders and bluish greens—early dawn in a hot land in the beginning of the world. Lilith's copper hair flamed like a low sun seen through the haze that foretells heat; her strange yellow eyes looked out at me, utterly soulless, and innocent with the innocence that was everybody's—once. It was in the viscid coils of the serpent, his wicked, flat head and unwavering, small eyes, that the suggestion of evil lay, and the lovely white woman seemed only his instrument, if a willing one. And how beautiful she was! Her features had the freshness of immortal youth, her lips were red and moist with youth, her arms and bosom gracious with it.

There was a mirror in the little inclosure where the models dressed. Impetuously, willing to shirk nothing, I went to it and switched on the electric light.

I saw a woman whose unnatural pallor and twisted features showed that she had passed through anguish, whose disordered dark hair was threaded with white. My eyes are thought my best feature; to-night they frightened me, for I fancied they looked like a mad-woman's. Not so long ago, a man who loved me might have called me beautiful, but now the bloom, the brilliance were gone forever, and when beauty was spoken of in connection with me, it would always be in the past tense.

"She must *have been* beautiful," people would say.

Anthony was an artist, and the contrast between me and Denise was to

him, of course, a thousand times greater than to me.

But is one loved only for one's appearance? Women have asked the wistful question for ten thousand years. Can a man love only a pretty face, and that only until he sees a prettier?

II.

The lives of most people roll on tranquilly enough, I imagine; probably few real lives arrange themselves about a plot of intricate detail and culminating interest. For myself, on two occasions drama has claimed me. In an evening, without warning or any presentiment on my side, the foundations on which I had reared my house of life crashed in, and I was left shelterless.

Anthony had belonged so wholly to me! It had been a possession as undoubted as my ownership of my own body and soul. We had seemed welded together, and for long years I do not remember to have thought of myself or of my own interests separately from his. There was something monstrous in the disentangling that had to take place, of what was mine by native right—in that community of interests, friends, pleasures, mortifications, and sorrows—and what had seemed to relate to me no less directly because it had first been Anthony's. On the gray years during which I tried to accomplish this, I will not dwell. I filled them with work, and if I went hungering within, I seemed, I think, a brisk and busy person. So much for appearances.

For all the world like those blank lapses of time noted on theater programs, four years passed.

Then, one rainy afternoon in Paris, the curtain rolled up again, and drama had its way with me once more. The work which had occupied me during the morning had no claims on my afternoon. It was May, and the perfume

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of the horse-chestnut blossoms combined with the smell of rain-wet asphalt to produce the haunting, stimulating odor characteristic of Paris in springtime, an odor fatally evocative of memories and dreams. I felt the need to see pictures, to smell paints, to dip myself for an hour in the old atmosphere of art and artists that had surrounded me in the old days when Anthony and I had worked and starved and been happy in this magical city. I went to the Salon.

The other pictures that I saw that afternoon are all jumbled in my memory like some wild unreeling of a cinematograph. I came on it suddenly in one of the smaller rooms—in a corner, but with its quota of admirers—and stood arrested as by the drive of steel into my bosom. Afterward, I remember thinking of it that Anthony had painted nothing so good before, but in that first moment, points of technical or other excellence escaped me.

For the picture showed a woman's face, and the face was mine—oh, unmistakably mine, though at my best I can never have been one-half so beautiful! But beauty is not always a thing of curves and colors, and while beauty was implicit in the pictured face, the bare lines of it were as faithful as a photograph to mine. The something added was of the spirit. It was the face of a woman seen through the eyes of a lover who has lost her; it was Beatrice enskied; it was the Blessed Damsel visioned—not from earth, which may hope for heaven and reuniting—but from the hopeless regions whence there is no return. Others felt this besides myself.

"She's very lovely," a girl near me was saying to her companion. "But what I like best is a kind of touching quality it has—I don't know why. It's so tremendously felt, isn't it?"

And I caught the man's reply:

"One would say he had moistened

his brush with his tears to paint her, like Fra Angelico. Oh, he loved her, that one! I wonder who she is?"

"*Il l'aimait d'amour, celle-la!*" The words rang in my ears as I felt my way to a seat. Well, yes, if the thing I trembled to divine was so patent to this stray Frenchman, it must be, must be true. The man who had so painted me loved me still, in spite of his infatuation for Denise, in spite of his facile desertion of me, in spite of the four years' estrangement. Every line of the picture said it, so plainly that he who ran might read, and I did not need the confirmation in words which, when the dispersal of the people about it allowed me to come nearer, I read upon the frame. Two lines of Rossetti's gave verbal expression to what the colors and brush strokes wrote plainly enough:

Look in my eyes. My name is Might-Have-Been.

I am also called No-More, Too-Late, Farewell!

He had used to read poetry to me in the long winter evenings, and the lines seemed to fall on my ears in Tony's own grave, musical tones. Drinking thirstily of the double assurance I had so longed for, I stood, I cannot guess how long, forgetting everything except that Anthony loved me, after all, in spite of everything.

I was roused by a familiar voice beside me:

"Mrs. Lassiter! Why, how are you? I am awfully glad——"

The voice died into a confused murmur as Frank Thurston's eyes went past me to the picture and back again. He was an American artist, an expatriate, of whom Anthony and I had seen much during our happy early days in Paris. He had lent us money, drawn stimulus from Anthony's youthful spirits and hopefulness, been grateful to me for many evenings in the warm home atmosphere a happy woman spreads about her, seeming to charge

the very air with some bright principle of gayety and well-being. He had heard the gossip about us, of course; he could read my red eyes and the words on the picture frame. It was no wonder that he turned red and stammered.

We exchanged commonplaces for a few moments, but in the old days we had been close friends, and I had had all his confidences. Insensibly we slipped back to realities.

"I know you won't let me say what I think about Anthony," Frank said. "But I'm glad, anyway, to be sure that you know what I think. This picture now—that a man who could paint that could— It's the way you used to look to me, in the old days when I was so sick of girl students with sloppy hair and sloppy clothes and sloppy morals—or easy Frenchwomen whose morals were the only sloppy things about them—and I'd find you in your apartment, with your graceful dresses and—*restrained-looking* hair—a sort of beautiful, unattainable ideal. Anthony," he ended violently, "is a confounded fool!"

I smiled as well as I could.

"He was within his rights. How often have you argued, yourself, for complete liberty in matters of love? His infatuation was so understandable, too. She was a marvelously beautiful creature. Did you ever see her?"

"Denise Duval?" His eyes widened. "Why, she's in Paris. She's posing again, but only for a favored few. I'm favored, and she comes twice a week to my studio—when she remembers it. She's promised for this afternoon, but she has a very violent affair on just now with Paul Mery, the sculptor, and I haven't an idea she'll find time for me."

"You mean," I asked slowly, "that she doesn't care for Anthony any more?" For I had heard nothing of either of them.

"Care for Anthony? Why, she left poor old Tony inside of a year!

She's married now, to the best little fellow—Jacques Pelletier. He has a shop for artists' supplies, and is the most moral, bourgeois citizen in Paris. He loves the ground she walks on—suffers the tortures of the lower regions whenever she smiles at another man, and forgives her angelically after every lapse.

"But won't you come home to tea with me? There isn't a chance in a hundred of Denise's remembering that engagement."

But it was just that hundredth chance that made me accept the invitation to Frank's studio.

A little man was waiting patiently on the landing before the door when we reached it—a man short, plump, dark-mustached, with the guileless eyes of a good child. He fell on Frank with a stream of French so rapid and colloquial that I could not follow it further than that it was a question of his wife, whom he expected to find at the studio. Frank tried to send him away, but the torrent of words poured on, ever more urgent, and at last he shrugged despairingly and admitted him. Introducing him to me as Monsieur Pelletier, he left us alone together, while he set afoot preparations for tea.

Monsieur Pelletier scanned my face closely, then broke out:

"But it is the Madame Lassiter of the portrait—the wife of Anthony Lassiter, the artist!"

My face crimsoned. I was on the point, perhaps, of being offended at this blunt challenge, but there was something in the Frenchman's personality—he had the simple, blundering sincerity of a well-meaning child—that excluded offense.

"I was," I murmured. "If you married Denise Duval, you probably know about—"

"Yes, madame. Oh, yes, I know. He was the first, that one, to take a

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little part of my Denise away from me. And since then there have been others. We are both—isn't it so?—two unhappy people, and unhappy not by our own fault. There should be sympathy between us. God knows, perhaps it's harder for a woman."

He leaned forward, his kind, candid eyes on my face, and quietly patted my knee.

"Yes, it is hard for us others—but it is a great privilege as well. Always, in every age, the glory of a country is its artists—always the best fruit of its greatness is the pictures and the songs and the beautiful books that are given to the world. And—do you see?—nothing is born without pain, no good thing comes without cost. Some one must pay for the beautiful picture and the beautiful book, and it is you and I, madame, who pay the heaviest part of the price.

"You and I, madame, are alike—when we assume a responsibility, we support it; when we run up a bill, it is because we expect to pay it; when we love, it is for life. We, you see, are bourgeois. We practice all the virtues, and we are indeed the backbone of the nation's life. But I have lived much with artists, and I understand them. They are like children; they see but the one thing at a time. So vivid is their delight in beauty, in the personality of the man or woman who for the moment stimulates and excites them, that they can see nothing else, and they forget the staid partner who waits for them at home. But when the glamour is gone and the new friend proves stupid or untrue, then it is a need of their natures that there should be some one waiting at home, unreproachful, ready to forgive."

He ranked Denise as a creative artist by Anthony's side, and I might have smiled at that, but I did not; I listened, wholly respectful. I found myself admiring him, this little bourgeois

shopkeeper. I envied him, certainly, his power of forgiveness. Even after seeing Anthony's picture, there was something hard in my heart toward him, a little core of pride that, I thought, nothing could ever melt.

The door was flung open violently, and a woman dashed into the studio, sobbing wildly beneath her veil. At sight of Pelletier, she faltered a moment, then flung herself impetuously into his arms. Between the brim of her hat and the laces at her neck, I caught a glint of copper hair, as she wept without restraint on his shoulder.

"Paul Mery," she raised her head to declare hotly, "is a beast! He is a pig! Never name him to me again!"

Ineffable joy beamed on Pelletier's face, as he patted her shoulder tenderly.

"It is agreed, little cabbage," he murmured gently. "We will forget the scoundrel."

And then the improbable, possible thing happened. The bell of the studio rang, and Frank's man, unsuspecting, opened the door and ushered in—Anthony.

I distinctly heard Frank, the length of the great studio away, exclaim, "My God!"

Pelletier unobtrusively drew Denise to the tea table, while I sat still, staring, I have no doubt, as if I saw a ghost.

Anthony, completely taken aback by my presence, which he must have expected as little as I his—though we both had been Thurston's friends—stood just inside the doorway, motionless, his eyes fixed on my face. Four years had changed him, and not for the better. His face was thin and haggard; the buoyancy I had thought unconquerable was quite gone from his bearing. I was too shocked and startled to find words, and for perhaps a full minute, we confronted each other in utter si-

lence. Only his eyes, hungry, supplicating, never wavered from my face.

Almost at once, Frank was between us, uttering violent, denunciatory sentences, insulting Anthony, ordering him away.

"Because I was your friend when I didn't know your character gives you no right to thrust yourself upon me now! Mrs. Lassiter is honoring my studio by her presence to-day. I will ask you to go, and at once!"

And Anthony, never taking his eyes off me, made no answer, only groped for the door handle behind him, turned it, and went out.

Frank, with triumph in his face, turned to me, expecting Heaven knows what—gratitude for his defense of me probably. I hated him for it, could have struck him. I passed him blindly and went after Anthony into the hall. He was halfway down the stairs, going slowly, a hand on the rail.

"Anthony!" I called.

He turned like a flash. I came down to him, slid my hand along the banis-

ter till it touched his. On the landings above and below, the rain-wet windows glimmered pallidly, but here the shadows held us. I said:

"I saw your picture. Anthony, I read the lines underneath it—'Look in my eyes.' Oh, Anthony, look, look in my eyes!"

His hands were on my shoulders; he was drawing me close, trying, in the darkness, to read my soul.

"Was I wrong, then?" he cried. "Is there a chance for me yet?" and his voice broke sharply on an agonized note of questioning.

"It isn't Too-Late, Anthony," I said. "It shall never be Farewell."

Several minutes later I began, "Denise—" but he interrupted me.

"Denise is a little beast!" he declared hotly. "You oughtn't to take her name on your lips! Let's never speak of her again!"

A memory of the Pelletiers floated to me, ironic, amusing.

"It is agreed," I murmured gently. "We will forget her!"

DEATH VERSUS ABSENCE

She

Why should I fear death? When you go away
But for a space, is not that death for me?
To my fond mind you are a memory
And nothing more then, just as much as clay
Mounded above could make you. Each delay
Of absence is itself eternity,
In which no more I feel and touch and see
Your body and your strength!

He

And yet / pray
That you may always live until I go,
Asking a thing God might not order so;
For in your absence I have right to yearn,
But death would give no answer but despair,
No fondled hope, though false, of your return,
No thinking, "That's her foot upon the stair!"

HARRY KEMP.



The Back of His Neck

By Horace Fish

Author of "The Trickstress,"
"The Little Chasm Rose," etc.

HIS whole surrounding country could have produced no more ordinary sight than he, riding into town. As his horse's hoofs thumped the bridge, the March sun was turning the streets to ways of gold, and beating down on the back of his neck. On this very vulnerable spot, through the close-clipped hair, it concentrated, in nature's merciless fashion, on the curious pink tan, to hasten the inevitable crease and spider's web of crinkling magenta that would tell the whole inquisitive world of his subservience to the soil.

But he never thought of the back of his neck. He was thinking that he was going to the bank to open an account with his own earned money, to buy with his first check a city suit and appear the gentleman he knew himself to be. And as he rode, the Cavalier struggling for breath in his generation made a last cry for recognition in his upright back, his whole lithe young body, rising with the beast, not from it.

With a smile uncontrollably near a grin, he stabled his horse at a river-front shack and swung into "Main." Town held the essence of life in her lap for him, and her lap was Main Street. Saturday, sunshine, a bank account, the phonograph shop—life!

He intended to go straight to the bank, but a "Saturday Only" spectacle snared his glance—a one-armed virtuoso inscribing visiting cards. He went up and watched. It would be a swell thing to hand to a girl! His fist wavered, went into his pocket. Then, his sensitive features flushing at thought of his farm clothes, he spelled the name, dwelling proudly on its peculiarities.

He went on to the bank and, came out of it radiant. But it was his emergence from the clothing store that was in essence an emergence. He had signed his first check in his underclothes. Now, in the decisive serge, sharp collar, dark-blue, white-dotted tie, he appeared the city youth.

On his horse, he had been a type. Now he was an individual, with features—brown-lighted eyes, soft hair of a still deeper brown, delicate, incurving cheeks with a rich color; a city boy—except for the back of his neck.

From the phonograph shop he could hear the alluring blare of the week's new records, exhibited for the country visitors. Life! It was this thumb touch of music that completed life in the sun-lighted lap of town. The intertwisting humanity in the store, the nearer and nearer definition of a melody as he worked his way closer, freedom from farm thoughts, "good" clothes, music—obviously, these things were life. Even the clerk's voice seemed to sound, to-day, more of life!

"Maddum Liria," it said, "now singin' this in the Opera House in Noo York!"

Subconsciously he heard the ugly scrape preparatory to a "fancy" record. And suddenly he felt a total hush, to which he was instinctively contributing. A voice lovely as an angel's was rising, falling, through the pure phrases of a ravishing melody. His lips parted as he listened. Now he was listening with his soul. He had not known that the earth, nor imagined that the universe, held things like that.

The woman who had sung seemed to picture herself to him, and he caught

his breath. She was a lovely thing of open green fields, dressed in white draperies, dappled with sunshine and shadow. His throat contracted with pain, yet he was oddly, inexplicably happy. She was pulling apple blossoms down to her mysterious face and kissing them with lips that had never been kissed—that to kiss would be the fulfillment of sweeping life—probably in the moment before glorious death.

It was natural enough that his vision should have been conjured from the cover of some music sheet.

He was nineteen, and all the yearning red of his blood seemed to be coursing through him with the rapidity of that disk which had called out, "Life! Life!" to him, when past him went an old farmer, plow-bent, weather-stained, and he shivered. He thought of his father, his grandfather. Such he must become, even to the horrible crackled rouge tan at the backs of their necks! A miserable ache caught at his heart. A distant scrape of the instrument reached him. It had been played again, and he had not listened! He went swiftly in and straight up to the clerk.

"I want that record. It's three dollars, ain't it?"

"Sorry. It's sold."

A rush of bitter jealousy swept over him.

"Who to?" he demanded.

The clerk pointed. He saw the back of the old farmer's neck bending over the trophy. *That* had the song—*that*, bent, leathered, old— She seemed far away, that apple-blossom girl! It was hundreds of miles, nine hours, to New York! For a little space that seemed an eternity, he stood hesitant and sore. Then, with heart pounding, he turned back to the clerk.

"Gimme the Noo York paper, please." And he searched through the tattered leaves for the advertisements.

"Is that her name?" he asked. "Tonight in what?"

"That's the opera's name—same as on the record."

"Thanks."

He spoke unsteadily, and he walked with pretended indifference from the store. On trim legs that trembled under him, he went back to the bank.

Life had taken him by the back of the neck.

He came blinking out into Thirty-third Street. The enormous vistas of the beautiful station had awed him, but the city, in its gaudily jeweled darkness, did not. In the station he had washed, thrown away his grimy collar, and put on a fresh one from a small, tight package in his hand. His imagination of the huge, desired pleasure city held no skyscrapers, only the opera house now. And, asking as he went quick questions, he hastened there. Through the long, wearying journey, the voice and vision had not failed him. Life had throbbed renewingly into him from them. He had doubted the girl of the apple blossoms only in moments which he had been able to toss away with a straightening of his slender shoulders, in utter conviction that such a voice must mean beauty of everything.

Before the big house he was frightened for a moment, because her name was not in big electric lights over the entrance, as he had expected it to be. But the opera's name corresponded with the advertisement in the newspaper, and he went to the box office with a rebound of happy confidence.

"Standing room only, sir. Dollar and dollar-fifty."

He tremblingly and joyously paid out one and a half, relieved of all embarrassment of speech and display of ignorance, and went in. The curtain had risen, but the star of his suddenly changed life had not, and long before she appeared, he had forced his way with perfectly innocent rudeness to a

place fairly near the stage, whence he could see clearly.

He was dazzled by the gorgeous lines of the house at which he gazed, at the gorgeous lines, too, of the lovely women both above him and below him, at the luxurious softness of the murmur coming from so huge a band. For the first time, he realized that he was frightened by the thought of seeing her. Then a hush and a throb of the orchestra brought her, and he choked with a trembling emotion that he could not have understood if he had tried.

She was not the girl of green and white and apple blossoms. She was a woman, beautiful, exquisite, magnificent, overpowering. Orchids would best have fitted her, though his groping mind would not have found the name of such a flower to express her. And the great aria was swaying the silent audience from gallery to gallery before he recognized it as the blossom girl's song.

With the realization came another that hurt while it enthralled him—that the voice itself was not quite the same. Though, from this richly throbbing throat, it had the same flute quality of bird, the same ecstatic quality of child, it was not this morning's song.

In the ent'rances, he wandered about the big house, dazed by its beauty and its people and by the throbbing of his own mind, and, toward the close of the bewildering opera, into the smoking rooms, admiring the suave, evening-clothed men; hating them, too, because, in sidelong looks up at their boxes, he had seen them chatting with dimly lit, beautiful creatures, their backs to her, and while she was singing! Country or not, he could at least appreciate her!

At the older men, his resentment was more bitter, because they, for all their white hair, were as erect and trig and fair of cheek as the younger ones, at an age when he would be like the old man who had bought the disk, though

he knew that the "calling cards" fresh in his pocket had on them a name as "good" as any of theirs could be.

Probably cards were all that these young bloods—he knew by instinct a few such expressions—would need in order actually to go to the stage and speak to her!

Again his thought leaped and his heart beat as they had at the store in town. His eyes kindled, luminous again, yet a shiver went over him at the thought of his helplessness to explain himself, perhaps to speak at all, if the chance of having got those cards should bring him the luck of—of—

Through the last act, though he swayed and thrilled to the beautiful voice, he suffered more than he had suffered in his whole life before.

And even more than in that last half hour of his life he suffered as he stood before a door to which the marvelously shaded card had got him led across the vast, awe-inspiring stage. A few of the "young bloods," true enough, were ahead of him—some near him, though he tried to keep out of their region, some chattering within the room.

A woman came to him, his card in her hand. She had picked him out directly. She was dressed in a maid's uniform, and seemed queenly without justification as she looked from the card to him, comparing them.

"You wish to see Madame Liria?"

"Yes, if you please. A—after the rest have gone," he stammered.

She returned to the room, with a look at him over her shoulder that seemed to say, "Very well," to his soft, gentle voice and manner, and, "What do you want, anyway?" to the rest of him. He seemed to wait endlessly. But the torture of suspense was softened by the gradual melting away of his predecessors.

At last the maid returned to him, and he followed her tremblingly. His deity looked curiously at him. Had he been

thinking of her years, her figure would have suggested a mature youth, a youthful maturity. The delicately compressed lines of limb and breast were definite, yet gracious, determined in contour and in deliberate movement, yet in these exquisitely graceful. She was very beautiful in feature and in color, her rich paleness of complexion setting off her kindling, heavy-lashed eyes. The quality of hauteur expressed by the emphatic posture of her shoulders faded to simple dignity in the gentler aspects of eyes and mouth.

Having, with her worldly magic of swift observation, thoroughly divined his speechless, hopeless embarrassment, she managed to urge the maid toward the door.

"Wait outside, Mary."

And, alone with him, she proceeded to put him at ease, not with the words she chose, but with her gentle articulation of them.

"You wished to see me about something, Mr.—er—and when my visitors were gone?" She glanced at his card, which he had rapturously seen she was holding in her lovely fingers.

"Yes, but nothing—special, ma'am."

"Won't you sit down and be comfortable? There is a chair—over there."

She thought she knew his case exactly. And she did know it, but not at all exactly. She did not know that she was dealing with a turned-aside descendant of a class that would contemptuously have trampled down her own ancestors of that period. The "ma'am," worst possible caricature of her achieved title, rasped her a little in its addition to the extraordinary card that had first aroused her curiosity.

But as he turned toward the chair she had indicated, his soft-voiced "Thank you" echoing in her sensitive ears, she saw the back of his neck, and, with the swiftness of emotion plausible in her profession, a tight,

small lump rose for a brief moment in her throat.

"You are from the country?" she asked quietly, as he gazed at her, great-eyed and speechless, from his chair.

"Yes, ma'am—Maddum Liria." He suddenly dared the name. That she had known he was from the country had not hurt him. It would have surprised him to learn that such a creature did not know everything.

"Did you enjoy my singing? Had you ever heard me before?"

He let the first question go with a glistening of his brown eyes and a silent smile of his red lips, and replied to the second query:

"Only on the phonograph."

"Ah!" She had been studying him swiftly, unerringly. She had discerned the respect without stupidity, the innocence without ignorance, in the liquid brown eyes, the fineness of the delicately molded, slightly hollow cheeks, the instinctive grace of limb and courtesy of posture.

"And having heard the opera, you wanted to see something of what a real singer, in a real opera house, was like—is that it?"

"Yes!" he cried eagerly. "Yes, that was just it! Only I couldn't have told you so!"

She smiled sympathetically and then was silent for a few seconds. Pervading all that she had seen, and above it all, had been his boyishness, beautiful to her in his silent confusion, in his complete awe of her. When she spoke, it was with a slight color of hesitancy in her words:

"Would you like—that is, would it give you pleasure—to go home for a bite of supper and a little chat at my house?"

At this miraculous new possibility he gasped, his eyes wide with delight.

"Just a moment," she said, and went toward the door. "Don't get up, please." She had swiftly seen, and ap-

preciated, this country child's instinct to rise because she had risen.

She closed the door behind her. The queenly Mary, through the heavy influence of sleep, had descended to a simple, peasant Mamie, dozing on her chair outside the room. The singer shook her gently.

"Go home, Mary. Fix things for me—something to eat—and don't sit up. Take a cab. And tell George to wait here. I'm coming presently."

The boy did not realize how the minutes flew before they stepped from the room. His head had been dizzy with happiness as she had gained his confidence with thoughtful, simple questions about life where he lived. Once she had said: "It's all as fascinating to me, you know, as this kind of life can possibly be to you." At last her wraps were on, and a few seconds later they had stepped into her car.

And it seemed to him as if but a few seconds more had rushed by when they were standing on the steps of her house.

"I'll bring it in a few seconds," she said crisply. "Good night, George."

"Bring wh—wh——" he stammered.

"You fool!" she whispered angrily. "I was talking for the chauffeur! Wait here!" And she swept imperiously into the house and shut the door.

When she returned, the car had gone, and he was staring after it, standing chagrined and wretched on the steps. In the lamplight she saw his drooped shoulders, and, once more, the back of his neck.

"Forgive me!" she exclaimed, the little lump rising in her throat again. "I ought to have admired you for it! But servants— Come in, my dear," and she led him through the doorway, his heart thumping at the unexpected word, casual and maternal as it had been.

Upstairs—forward through a dim, thick-carpeted hall—into a marvelous room whose door she closed behind them.

Despite his excitement, he swung off her cloak as a cavalier would have done, then, in his trembling, dropped it. As he stooped for it, blushing hopelessly, again she saw the back of his neck, and for the third time she was seized by an instinctive throat grip at its pathos.

"Sit down, please—there, on the couch—while I get things. Don't help me, for I know where the things are, and it's easier for me than to show you. You see, Mary has set a place for one—very naturally."

As he sank back on the heavy, soft couch, he saw that this was her music room, giving upon her boudoir. Between the loosely drawn curtains, he could glimpse the little nest's beautiful French grays and pinks. She was passing between it and the small table by the great fireplace of the music room, which glinted under a silver light. As she went by, she spoke enough to put him more and more at ease.

"This is your first visit to New York? Yes? And how long have you been here?"

"I went right to the opera house," he said ingenuously.

She paused in her astonishment.

"You see, I came just to see you."

"You dear boy!" she began, but at the flush that swept his cheeks, she switched her words to a diminutive crescent-shaped decanter that was glinting its fine facets in her white hand. "Cognac. And its size, in justice to me, is a fair show of my use of it. It will be just right for both of us. I'm very tired after the performance, and you—you poor boy, after your trip today! How far is it—how long?"

"About four hundred miles, I think. Nine hours."

She stared at him with widening eyes.

"To see me! Well, I won't show appreciation now, except with sandwiches. You must eat thousands of them! I can make more. Sit down!"

As she sank into the luxurious chair

placed for her, he drew forward a smaller upright one for himself and sat deferentially opposite her. She sat back languorously, not so much studying him now as permitting herself to enjoy him. She seemed older to him than she had at first, yet even more beautiful. And all that she was allowing her thoughts was the beauty of his youth.

She was drinking it—from his great, shining, innocent eyes, from his awe of her, abject, yet manly, from his totally unconscious grace of limb and gesture, from his soft occasional voice in answer to some question she had framed in order to hear it, from his rich red lips—experienced, perhaps, but unstained. He seemed to her a thing directly from the soil and as directly pointed to the sunlit clouds. Her questions were of the this and that of art exemplified in her room, to see how little he knew. And his answers displayed complete ignorance and wonderful instinct. In her silences, he showed no uneasiness, but apparently wandered into his own thoughts of his wonderful adventure, unconscious of the flight of speechless moments. Though she was talking to him in the closest familiarity, it was almost as if he were not there, and then his marveling, full-eyed attention was as if her words came from a throne, humbly interspersed by him with rare, diligent "Yes, ma'ams."

"I should like to see you in places packed with things of beauty, and watch you look at them—in the Louvre, in the dusty brick palace at Versailles, in the Sistine Chapel, with the back of your neck totally out of sight, as you stared up at Adam who started you. You're as wonderful an Adam as that, in a different way. And I'd like to see you on some hill looking down at the Mediterranean."

"That would be—wonderful!" he gasped, his eyes brighter than ever.

"It would be wonderful for me," she said. "Though you wouldn't under-

stand what I mean by that—any more than you understood my speaking of the back of your neck. Very few people would—you least of all. Perhaps your mother has broken her heart over it now and then—unless she's too terribly used to it. And any sculptor would see it. And perhaps a painter—a great one. Millet would. And—I did."

"I—I think I understand what you mean," he said sadly, but unresentfully. "Millet painted 'The Angelus,' didn't he? And it's because I'm like that—dumb."

She shook her head, her eyes gazing far away.

"No, dear, no, it's not that you're dumb. You're very far from dumb." Suddenly she said: "Isn't it all strange—this, you and I—talking this way, as if we'd known each other all our lives? In an hour—surely it's no more! And liking each other as if we were old friends. I suppose it's an adventure for you, and I know it's one for me. And do you know why? Because it's a simple, innocent matter of a quiet supper here in my own home, and a chat with some one new to me. The big adventures, rare as they are, I'm tired of. And this— Tell me, how has it happened—happened *perfectly*, as it has? Why do you like me? You do, or you wouldn't have tried to see me. Just when I began to like you, I can't remember—at what moment, at what thought. We are good friends, aren't we? When did it begin with you?"

He was gravely silent for a moment, as if deliberating over the correctness of his words as he chose them. Then his eyes looked quietly up at hers with the simple directness of a child's.

"I began to love you when I first heard your voice—on the phonograph."

She stared at him, her eyes blank for a moment, her lips parted. Then she lowered her eyes and, without any answer, sat thinking. She knew the possible fascination of a woman of her

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years for a boy of his, and she had heard the famous three words many times and in many tongues. But as her mind rushed painfully back through her life of brilliant colors and scintillant episodes, she thought that she had never heard them with the sweetness that they had held, in their utter simplicity, just now.

She stood and walked across to one of the windows. She had looked at him swiftly as she had risen, and he had not seemed to be expecting any answer. He was gazing at the fireplace, his look far off.

She did not turn from the window until abruptly, stumblingly, he began to explain about the store, the record, and the girl with the apple blossoms. At his vague, embarrassed painting of what her voice had conjured, a little shadow of pain played upon two minute lines below her eyes and made her beautiful face still older.

"But, my dear, you must have known I wouldn't be exactly the same, no matter what I was?"

"You are more wonderful and beautiful than any one I ever dreamed of," he answered.

She was silent again. Then—

"Dear little boy," she said, "go over and lie back on the couch. You're very tired. I want to talk to you about something."

As he did her bidding, she came from the window and sank into a big chair diagonally facing him.

"My dear, you have just told me something very beautiful, and I'm wondering whether you realized what you said—realized it and meant it. You seemed to be thinking before you spoke. Yet *did* you think, before you used that word?"

"Yes," he answered. "I did think. It isn't an easy word to use to anybody. But there wasn't any other, and I knew and meant the word I used."

She had taken his hands softly in

hers. Now she loosed them and sank back in the big chair.

"That touches me very much, dear. And what I'm going to say now to you isn't an easy thing to say, either—like your beautiful word. I—I am very fond of you. I should like to keep you close to me, with me. You are very sweet and very dear. But life, even for the freest of us, is very dear in a very different sense, and not sweet at all. I am free, you are free, I have money—plenty. Yet how helpless we are! It would be wonderful if we had, and could keep, something big enough and splendid and fine enough to take us together to all those wonderful things and places that I spoke of. And society, though most people don't know it well enough to understand this, is the most lenient, tolerant thing in the world, demanding nothing but external recognition. But, dear, the secret thing that isn't gloriously secret is worse than nothing—it's sordid, detestable. Am I not right, dear?"

In her heart of hearts, she had hoped for hot denial, youthful defiance from him, but all that he said was, with a little sigh, "Yes, ma'am."

"And there is something else, dear little boy," she went on after a silence, "that I'm going to tell you because of the beautiful word you used to me—as you used it. The world has much to teach you, dear, and to those dear to me, I am no pretender. Little boy, I am not a married woman, yet there have been in my life—men." She did not have to lower her eyes, because he had lowered his. "I—I'm not a bad woman, I think. I'm not willing to think so. But, as such things go, I've not been what is called 'good,' either."

To this boy, for the first time in long years, she felt shame in speaking such words.

"I don't know why I should tell you things like this. And yet I do know, perfectly well. It was because, after

you said to me what you said, it seemed as if it were—a duty. Have I hurt you? Do you shiver at me? Is the glamour all gone? Can you understand at all how such things are with famous women? Do you feel different toward me?"

He slowly shook his bent head before he raised his great brown eyes and looked into hers.

"I've been a hellyun myself," he said.

Though she shut her eyes to hide it, pain almost insufferable had shot through her at his simple words. She had gloried in his exquisite youth. And now there had swept upon her and surged through her an instantaneous, furious jealousy of his babyish, unthinking past. As she struggled against the absurdity of her wound, his whole slender loveliness became fresh pain to her, and she closed her eyes.

His, time and again, had rested on her phonograph. He rose and went toward it. In passing her, he did the first voluntary thing of intimacy in their brief acquaintance—he touched her shoulder, swiftly, almost reverently. A little sudden sound came from him as he chanced upon the disk that had whirled his life around. She was standing behind him, brushing two tears from her eyes as she looked at the back of his neck.

"Can I play this?" he asked eagerly.

"Of course, dear! But," she exclaimed over his shoulder as she saw what it was, "I'll sing it for you!" She laughed softly. "Between such boy-and-girl friends as we, surely to sing for you is the least I can do, tired or not!"

He dropped the disk almost reluctantly as he turned back toward the couch.

She went to the piano, and the wonderful, thrilling aria filled the room. When she had finished, there were tears in her own eyes, but not in his. It had not been the apple-blossom girl's

song of the morning. His eyes were bright merely with wonder at the great, golden volume of the voice, its gemlike art.

When she rose, she went across to the window, as she had done before, and stood with her arms raised, her fingers interwoven with the curtain, her lips whispering:

"God, God, shall I bless You or curse You for this miracle?"

She came slowly away and leaned forward toward him from her chair.

"My dear, a thought has come to me. When I think of all that my life is, with all its gayety and its music and its opportunity for—beauty—Do you understand that word as I say it, dear?"

He thought for a moment.

"Yes, I think I understand the way you use it. In that sense, it would be—you, for one thing."

She blushed joyously, but did not strive to answer his childlike truthfulness.

"When I think of all that already in my life, and then of the more and more of it possible to my life, and then think of—of what you have to go back to—well, dear little boy, I revolt, that's all! I revolt at this intangible thing that makes you and me together 'impossible.' Shall we try to find some way, then? Let's try! With two souls understanding enough and two wills big enough, can't we surround and crush down that very 'impossibility' I've talked about? Shall we?"

"Yes!"

His hands trembled into her reaching ones, and his eyes shone with a great, unbelievable gladness.

She drew him closer to her.

"There is one more thing I must ask you, dear little boy, and then I have something very wonderful to tell you."

Her arms slipped around him, one of her hands rested tenderly, almost hovering, on the back of his neck;

but he did not bend to caress her, and an instant's new pang drove through her as she realized that what some country girl by the moonlit roadside would have compelled by instinct, she must compel by art.

"Dear, before we dare try, I must be sure. I am very selfish. I won't risk failure. Before we attempt at all, I must know! You remember the words you used to me, more beautifully than any one ever used them to me before. And do you realize that, in all the long minutes since then, you have not said them to me again?"

He gazed across her for a moment, again as if thinking, choosing. Then he looked her in the eyes, and between his last words were little pauses that made the most perfect of emphasis.

"From the bottom of my heart, I—love—you."

She drew his head down close to her pale face.

"Then kiss me, dear," she whispered, and for a moment the sweet touch of his red lips thrilled her soul.

When she rose to her feet, she put her hands on his slender shoulders and looked down at him with eyes that had grown brilliant through their dusk.

"Dear little boy, this is what I was going to tell you. Did you hear me when I prayed over there at the window?"

"Yes," he said, looking innocently up at her.

"Did you understand what I said?"

"I heard the words, but I didn't try to understand."

"I hope you'll be glad when you understand, dear. When I said to God, 'Shall I bless You or curse You for this miracle?' I meant by 'miracle' not your love for me—I have been loved, dear, many times—but that I was able to love you; that, so late, such a love as yours could be offered to me and that I, too, could love! Oh, my darling, with all that I have left—and to-night

I feel that I have everything left—I love you, love you, love you!"

As she began to move about the room, he gazed at her with his brown eyes shining, wondering, astonished. She—*she*—loved *him*, as much as he loved her!

"Oh, isn't it wonderful, wonderful? I didn't suppose I'd ever have happiness quite like this, and here it is in my hands, suddenly, in a few hours! I don't know when I began to love you. I think it began the first moment I saw you!"

"Dearest, think what we'll see together! All the beautiful things, all the marvelous cities—together! That will be happiness for you, I know, and for me, happiness all over again, multiplied a thousand times, seeing you see! And this, too, you must know, my darling—that it shall be only for the time it lasts. I'll be getting almost old soon, and you—you are just getting to be a man. I'll never cling to you, sweetheart—only while you cling to me. I promise that!"

Little practical distresses had been pinching at his mind.

"You'll get tired of me first," he said. "To-morrow, or anyway the next day, you'll be disgusted with my table manners."

"Never, never!" she laughed. "Dear, I'm a woman first, a gentlewoman afterward. And you—you're a gentleman first, afterward a man. Oh, how I love, love you, my little boy! I want to mold you, shape you, be everything in your life—mother, sister, lover—the very trinity of love that a woman like me always longs to be. I want to immerse you in it, make it so tremendous that, after you have left me, if I can find the courage through the great sleep, we may yet wander again hand and hand among the stars! How can I tell you how I love you? I worship you!"

She dropped to her knees, crossed

her hands upon his, pressed her forehead upon them.

"Oh, my darling, can you know how completely I love you? The whole completeness of you—your soul, your eyes, your voice, your 'yes, ma'ams,' the—the back of your neck!"

He was staring over her head, his luminous eyes wide, a look of fright in them. He would, perhaps, gladly have died for her. But he knew that he could not have assailed her with such words as those.

When she rose, he bent his own face to hide its pallor, and her hand strayed through his hair. After a few moments, he lifted his face and straightened up. He did not look at her.

"But—with things—like this—the truth's the only thing, and—I don't love you—that way."

She snatched her hand from his head and stared at him as he turned his miserable eyes to her.

"But," she gasped, "you told me you loved me! I asked you again—so that I should be sure—and you told me again!"

"I do love you, I do!" he whispered. "It's only that with me it's been a sort of dream. I never thought of you in any way but that. I can't bear to! And, oh"—he looked imploringly up at her—"because we don't love each other—the—the same way, it's got to be all over? There—there—can't be anything at all?"

"Why should there be?" she demanded.

He turned his head desolately away and lay with his face buried in the cushions.

"You've cheated me! You brought me a miracle and then snatched it brutally away! You made me believe that I could exult in the love that I've stored and stored up in me! I was willing to give you all that I have—all the accumulation of my life. And having

thrown away such a love, what, what will your life be?"

"I'll work on the farm, I s'pose," he whispered from the pillows.

"And—marry!" She cried it in a surge of helpless agony.

"I—s'pose so," he whispered.

Tensely she stood over him, to drag from him one more torture.

"If—if I had been the girl of the apple blossoms, would you—would you—"

"I s'pose so," he whispered wretchedly.

"Oh," she cried, "how cruel, cruel you've been! In my way, I was happy when you came, and—*now*! Oh, I detest—detest you for it! I've given you my whole soul, and what does it mean to you? Merely something to boast of on the farm!"

He turned suddenly from the pillows.

"How do you dare say that?"

She shrank back.

"Yes, how do you dare?" he cried passionately. "I've got a right to say it because my feelings are hurt! Boast about you? When I've told you I love you with all of my heart? And you go call me that kind of a low-down beast just because I—I can't feel the same way you do! How can I help it if I don't? It ain't natural!"

With the word, his voice broke, and he buried his face again. Her voice was husky.

"I lied when I said I detested you—my—darling."

He turned and seized her hands imploringly.

"Oh, don't detest me! Please, please don't! I adore you so! And I wouldn't mind that part, only—without that couldn't we find some way? And I'd try, try to love you like that! Oh, isn't there some way so it needn't all—"

"Yes! Yes!" she cried. "There must be! We'll talk! We'll think! The wine will keep us alive and our

minds awake, won't it, dear? Here, drink this." She poured the topaz vigor out between them.

She talked hastily, insistently.

"Dear, with determination enough, ideals enough, we will find a way! Darling, this thing is what you thought it was, only I want it to be more, everything! We must have all we talked of! Oh, we will!"

The wonderful wine had brought the eager gladness back into his eyes, the flush of a shy child had come into his tired cheeks.

"Do you know—all that time I was lying with my face hidden, when you'd said there couldn't be anything at all, that it was all over—do you know, all that time I was—was crying, like—like a baby?"

Quick, shamed tears sprang into her own eyes, and she knelt at his side, her arms tightening around him.

"My poor little boy! My darling, my darling!"

He put his arms around her shoulders, but she quivered pitifully under the forcedness of the little pats that he gave them.

"Oh, I can't! I can't!" he cried, and turned his face from her new wretchedness.

When she had struggled miserably to her feet, he looked up at her, and his starry eyes were underlined with heavy black marks.

"Dear little boy," she whispered, "we're both very tired. Let's not, because of that, give up! When we're rested, shall we try to find a way once more?"

He did not answer, and she looked swiftly down at him. The journey, the opera, the adventure and its throbbing heart, had done their work. The great eyes were closed.

For an instant, swift resentment stabbed through her. Then she cautiously, tenderly drew him down and pillowed his head and feet upon the

couch. She managed to unbutton the stiff collar, her fingers lingering a moment on the slender throat. Gently she unlaced and drew off the boots. Smoothing back the brown hair, she bent and brushed with her lips the white brow.

She went quietly about extinguishing the lights, then to the window. She opened it, and a faint glow of breaking dawn ghosted in.

Near her boudoir, she stood still, with her arms thrown up and across her hair, as she was seen in rare moments of *Isolde*, within her a huge impulse struggling to throttle a huge pride. At last she went swiftly over to the couch, carefully turned the boy's head on its side, leaned down so that she felt his warm breath on her cheek, and kissed the back of his neck.

More swiftly she went into the boudoir and threw herself upon the bed. As she lay there, with her beautiful head upon one arm, so that she could see him till she slept, the grim green of dawn and arc light came between the curtains and sparkled on her gems. She heard him gritting his teeth, as a baby does in its sleep. She thought of her blossom time that had gone by in such struggle that, when she had achieved the perfect flower in her voice, it was gone from herself. And presently, in uneasy sleep, she seemed to hear that voice singing, singing the great aria—joyous, birdlike, childlike—as it had been when she had been—in-
nocent.

In the terrible pain of it, she sat up suddenly, striving to crush the pure young voice by waking.

But the song kept on. Silently she crept to the curtains. As she reached them, the aria stopped. The only sound was the unheeded, nerve-rasping scrape, scrape, scrape of the needle on the whirling disk.

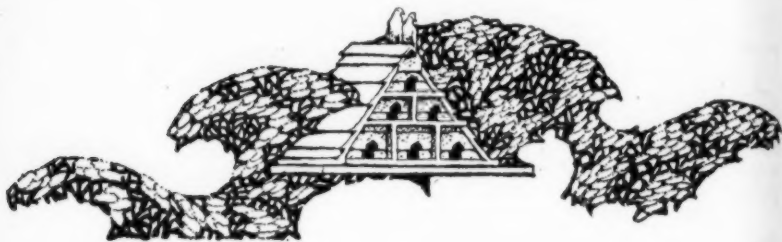
He was sitting beside it, his head bowed on the low stand, his arms fallen

limply down between his knees in a hopeless posture of dejection. She could see only the back of his neck. His new hat was beside him.

As the hideous scrape, scrape penetrated to his consciousness and he lifted a hand to stop it, she shrank back and, with her heart pounding, lay stealthily

down. She choked back a desperate cry as she heard the door close, and tried to lie still. But after a few seconds she sprang uncontrollably from the bed and ran to the window.

All that she could see of him going away from her was what she most loved of him—the back of his neck.



THE MAGIC INN

I FOUND last night a magic inn,
A woodland hostelry.
The sheets? Ah, fine as spiders spin,
Silver, webbed daintily.

I drank wine from an amethyst,
A grape dead-ripe with June.
All night a hidden lutanist
Plucked a low slumber tune.

My bed was black as ebonwood
And gave a spicy smell.
A dead man in his coffin could
Not rest the half so well.

Yet when at dawning I arose,
Along my path to fare—
Beggar!—I had on all my clothes,
And bright dew on my hair!

CARLYLE F. MACINTYRE.



The Goblin Girl

By Edgar Saltus

Author of "Imperial Purple," etc.



THERE'S Mr. Tams with that creature!"

Nelly Fay bit her bright lip, clenched her small hand, overturned her chair, and, abandoning her mother and the veranda, rushed into the house, not omitting to slam the door.

Beyond, on the road, a motor freighted with youth and beauty had shot like a comet. Mrs. Fay blinked at it. Then, rising, she sneezed and followed her daughter.

Nelly at the moment was staring unseeingly at a tall mirror which showed back her lemon-colored frock, her slim figure, and her face, which even in anger was delicious. It takes a very pretty girl to look appetizing when she is furious, yet in that, and without trying to in the least, she succeeded. She had the loveliest features, amber hair, and eyes big and blue, blue as the sea and bluer.

But now, conscious of her mother's approach, she turned on her.

"I do wish you wouldn't wear that ridiculous shawl! It gives me the fidgets!"

The hall, high and wide, gravely furnished, led to the dining room. Nelly, her mother in leash, went on and into this room, where already luncheon was ready, and where Fred, her brother, a good-looking lad in admirably cut clothes, presently followed.

Sarah, a maid, whom Mrs. Fay openly treasured, served them. The midday meal began. Fred ate with quiet ferocity, Mrs. Fay uncomplainingly, Nelly not at all. But she drank. She took a whole glass of water at a gulp.

Fred, eying her, interrupted himself and laughed.

"Did you see Tams and his secretary? A hummer from Hummersville, eh?"

Nelly gave him one look. Immediately, like a beautiful whirlwind, she had gone. Surprisedly, Fred turned to his patient mother.

"I say! What's wrong now?"

If Mrs. Fay knew, she omitted to tell. As for Nelly, if she had tried, she would have failed. She herself did not know. That she was quivering with anger, she was aware. But as will sometimes happen to angered people, she did not know what she was angry at. The week previous, she had been subjected to a grave affront. The memory of it still rankled. But it was not that. Then what was it?

In her bedroom, to which she had flown, darkly she wondered. Then, precisely as you may have seen in a moving picture, before her stood Tams.

Tams was an inventor. He had discovered a process whereby you could—one of these days—telephone along a

shaft of light. He had discovered tamsar, that explosive of which the dynamics exceed the potentialities of trinitrotoluol. He had in process of completion an aeroplane that would serve as a rocking-chair and on which you could fly out of the window. Recently he had been occupied with a theatrical device which Goldburg, the showman, intended to produce in "The Goblin Girl," a musical comedy that was to delight Broadway.

For the rest, Tams was a virile, resolute man, with eyes that, while blue, were not the blue of the sea or of the sky, but of steel. They were very determined. So, too, was his jaw. He gave the impression of getting what he wanted. At the time when this drama began, he wanted two things, neither of which he ever mentioned. There was the theatrical device. He wanted it to be a go. But first and foremost and over and beyond everything else, he wanted Nellie Fay.

In the Long Island village where, during the summer and the better part of the autumn, the Fays resided, Tams had a bungalow and a workshop. In town he had an office and presumably a clerk. In any event, during the past week he had apparently acquired a secretary, a young woman with whom he motored about and with whom, through the bungalow's wide-open windows, he was seen at table.

Previously, of an evening, he had looked in on the Fays. Fred liked him, Mrs. Fay liked him, so did Nelly. Moreover, of an afternoon, when he could get off early enough, he and Nelly had gone for a ride.

Nelly always looked well, but she looked best astride. Her togs were perfect and perhaps a bit heady. In these togs, one green afternoon, when riding through the woods with Tams, her cob picked a stone. The immediate limp had made that so obvious that both had stopped and dismounted. In the

process of extracting the stone from the hoof, they had collided. A moment later, he had got a crack on the head.

Meanwhile, he had caught her, held her, kissed her, and would have kissed her again, but she had fought free and hit out, slashing him with her crop as hard as she could across the face. It had made quite a welt. Then, in a jiffy, she had been on and off.

Tams had rubbed his face, held a hand to it, jumped on, hurried after, overtaken the girl, and apologized.

Nelly, her cheeks aflame, her nose in the air, to all intents deaf and blind, had ridden on, first at a run, then at a gallop, then at a canter. The village had been reached. There, spotting a girl, she had waved at her, hopped off and, bridle in hand, walked along to the girl's house, where she had tied the cob and entered.

At that, Tams, whose apologies had not ceased until she had dismounted, had gritted his teeth, wheeled, and vanished.

Since then, except with that creature, Nelly had not seen him nor had she wished to. The memory of his offense was too recent. It rankled, and not at all because she had not been kissed before, for she had been. Yet, after such kisses as she had previously received, her pulse had registered normal. That woodland kiss had been different. Unwarranted and unawaited, it had hurt and alarmed her.

The hurt had passed; the alarm had subsided; only anger remained, and its persistence perplexed, for she was angry in spite of herself, angry with an anger that was akin to a fever that you cannot shake off, but that does shake you. She was quivering with it. It parched her throat, flushed her face, and she wondered if she were going to die.

The possibility was not unwelcome. She had nothing to live for. She felt not only ill, but old, and not only old,

but haggard. Hitherto, wherever she had gone, she had drawn the eyes of men. She had trailed admiration as a torch trails smoke. It had all been myrrh and cassia to her. But now its savor had gone, and this girl who had the charm and the caress of spring in her face, decided that she had nothing to live for.

Then, precisely as a moment before she had evoked Tams, now she evoked "that creature."

She had had but one good look at her. That had been at the post office. He had tooted up, got out, and gone in just as Nelly had approached. He had not seen her nor, apparently, had his companion deigned to. The latter had sat in the car staring indifferently at nothing.

It was then that Nelly had had the one good look. It had frozen her. In none of the picture galleries of romance, in none of the museums of history, had she seen or imagined such a face. The quality of its beauty—coldly austere, as true beauty ever is—was unearthly. The eyes were stars, and in the carriage of the head, the cameo features, the glowing skin, the brilliantly invincible mouth, there were suggestions polar and dazzling. It was as if flesh and blood had achieved the impossible ability to detain and display some glory of the arctic aurora.

Before it Nelly had shrunk. In her own face was the loveliness of the lily, but before that other face she had felt it wither. A moment only. She had rallied at once.

"She isn't a gentlewoman," she had instantly and arrogantly decided. "And she's common."

The latter attenuation had been induced by the lady's dress, which, though evidently a Fifth Avenue production, had been in coloring too pronounced for good taste and consequently unbecoming. Beauty, when fulgorant, should be soberly attired. This cos-

tume, the latest revival of a mid-Victorian mode, had been as gaudy as a peacock's tail, and the gaudiness of it had dimmed her beauty, which had been otherwise diminished by a necklace of coral. But her face was supernal.

These details, however long in the telling, Nelly, with feminine ability, had summarized in that one good look, which had consumed hardly more than a second and amounted to but a glance.

Next to the post office was a shop, with that odor of having everything in it which village shops contrive to exhale. Nelly had turned and strolled in, turned and looked out.

Tams had issued from the post office, approached the car, said some word to the young woman, got in beside her, and they had driven off.

At that Nelly had vacated the shop. Then, in passing the post office, she had noticed a little crowd that had gathered, and, as she had moved on, she had overheard detached philosophies:

"Well, I never!" "And the airs of her!" "A ballet girl, I'll bet." "One of those Russians."

Nelly knew better. Through her brother, she knew that, whatever the creature's nationality might be, she was not a dancer, but Tams' secretary and probably respectable, though certainly vulgar, and poignantly she wondered whether the awful costume had been his selection—which, she later discovered, it had.

But that was afterward. At the time, dismissing the costume, she had wondered, and still more poignantly, whether Tams was to marry the person who wore it. The mere idea had made her sick.

Since then several days had intervened, days punctured by the spectacle of the creature shooting by, as she had on this high noon, like a comet. It was a little too much.

Now, in her bedroom which gave on the lawn and the road, Nelly seated herself at the window. There, as she sat, as sits Durer's image of Melancholy—only much better dressed—something from without or within vibrated.

Before her the man again appeared, but not the one she had known. Another had come, a new one, composed of prowesses and powers hitherto ignored, and at once the form invisible and undefined that inevitably resides in the heart of a girl, and which is but the unincarnated soul of him who is destined to rule it, took substance. Then, as a weed of the sea, loosened and detached, rises slowly, stayed by one eddy, deflected by another, before achieving its gradual, yet assured ascent, a revelation, arrested by a tremor, again by a blush, surged from the depths of her being.

"But I love him!" she cried.

There is magic in those words. No sooner were they uttered than an exterior force seemed to lift her from herself. Her mind became a rendezvous of apparitions. He appeared in countless phases—as she had seen him first, as she had seen him last, in all the changes of their acquaintance—and a shudder seized her at the knowledge of this love, of which she had been unconscious, and which had been tossed into existence by the sight of that creature.

That was it. She stood up and confronted it. That was the solution of the riddle of her anger. She was in love and she was jealous, and she could not be jealous unless she loved, and she could not love without being jealous.

Then immediately the exterior force that had lifted her from herself threw her back on that chair.

"I love him," she stranglingly repeated, "and he is in love with another!"

Like a flying picture, torn from the

cinematograph of memory, the wonder of that other's face flashed by.

The picture faded, succeeded by another—the green depths of the wood, the surprise, the kiss, the lash—that lash which now, consoled as he was, he never would forgive, and that kiss which now never would be repeated.

Despairingly she turned, threw a glance out of the window, and wished she could follow it.

Instead of anything so dramatic, she stared. Her hand clenched as it had on the veranda; her face flamed as it had when she had fled from the wood.

At the gate a motor had stopped and from it he and that creature were alighting.

Dumfounded at the audacity, conscious that if he were capable of that he was capable of anything, and, through one of the sudden somersaults of the emotions, conscious also that it was no longer love that she had for him, but hate, she turned, hurried to the door, and locked it.

But it was impossible, she told herself. She had become the plaything of her own imagination and, to assure herself of the mistake, she hurried back from the door to the window.

Mistake indeed! There they were, actually walking up the path, she leaning on his arm and he talking lowly to her. It was more than flesh could bear. Nelly began to cry.

Her tears—tears of anger, of humiliation, of sheer helplessness—fell swiftly like the ripple of the rain. Not to stay them, for she could not, but in an effort to get away from herself, she flung herself face downward on the sofa.

What should she do, she plaintively wondered. What could she do? To whom could she turn? Long since her brother, as was his custom, must have gone to town, where he would remain until late, and her mother, as was her custom, was certainly asleep.

Well, there was comfort in that, she decided. There would be no one to receive them. In the consolation of it, she sat up and, reflecting, perhaps sagely, that there is no use in spoiling one's looks, she dabbed at her slackening tears.

But now who was this? There was some one on the stair, some one at her door, some one who rapped, some one who spoke:

"Miss Nelly, Mr. Tams and a lady."

The effrontery of that! Why, she wouldn't even deign to answer!

"Miss Nelly, are you out?"

Tentatively a hand turned the resisting knob. Then presently she heard Sarah redescend the stair.

Now they would go, she told herself. They would have to, and when they had, she would put on her things and get her cob and have a good run. She did not care any more, not for anything or anybody.

At that reflection, finding herself crying again, she bit her lip. But to the soul that is sinking, hope throws always a straw. Perhaps, she told herself, some day, some time, her heart would be at peace. Perhaps. And fortified by the tolerably vague possibility, she stood up, went to the window again, and looked out.

There he was, strolling along to the motor, but alone.

Nelly craned a bit to see if that creature could be lagging behind. But no, he was really alone, and at once the partially appeasing idea occurred to her that, before presuming to get more than a bit beyond the gate, he had at least had the decency to pack that person off.

Yes, he must have, she decided, for now he was in the motor; now, with a toot, he had gone.

Assured of this, Nelly contemplated her lemon-colored frock, changed leisurely from it into her perfect togs, washed her face in sweet waters, took

her crop and her gloves, unlocked the door, and went down.

But in the hall below, voices from the veranda arrested her. For a moment, her head drawn back in that attitude which a deer has when surprised, uncertainly she stood. Who could be out there? A sneeze informed her. That sneeze she recognized. Her mother was there. But, filled with wild surmise, she shook her crop. Could that creature be there, too?

Yet now, from the other end of the hall, a faint clatter of dishes came. A-tiptoe she went toward it. In the dining room Sarah was busying herself. At sight of the girl, she put down a tray.

"I thought you was out, miss."

Nelly lifted a finger.

"Who is on the veranda?"

"Mr. Tams and a lady and your mother."

"Mr. Tams! I saw him go."

"Yes, miss, while your mother was dressing, he went to the post office. He came back a minute ago. The lady waited for him. She——"

Sarah took up the tray.

"Well?"

"Nothing, miss. I asked her would she have a cup of tea, and she just looked at me, like that!" Sarah bulged her eyes. "A foreigner, I'm thinking."

Nelly, meditating escape by the back door, switched her crop and might have gone, but from the veranda a wave of laughter rolled richly like a flood of wine.

To her overwrought nerves, it was a bugle blast. With an uplift of the chin, she straightened. No back door, no cowardice for her! She would march out, her head in the air and good day to them, but civilly, for this was her house and, however insulted, she would not be betrayed into anything petty, though if that creature were a foreigner, perhaps she might be beneficently inspired to say to her something

—well, something pleasant and acid, in French.

To that end a reconnaissance was needful—the lay of the land, the position of the enemy, the advantage or disadvantage of an abrupt sortie.

"Give me a drink of water, please," she said to Sarah.

It was the stirrup cup, and, having drunk it, she went on, this time not in the hall where she might be seen, but into the sitting room, which gave on the veranda and through the latticed windows of which she could peer.

"Yes," Tams was saying as, noiselessly, she approached. "But she limps."

Mrs. Fay, in a shawl, had her back to the window. Opposite, leaning against the railing, was Tams. Beyond, in a chair, sat the creature.

"And, oddly enough, only in one leg—the left. There's something wrong with it."

Mrs. Fay sneezed.

"I hadn't noticed it. But you say she sings?"

Tams nodded.

"Anything—duets, trios, a whole chorus—whatever you like."

Mrs. Fay sneezed again.

"It does seem wonderful."

Tams, leaning forward, took the young woman by the hand. At the touch, slowly she turned her head and covered him with her starlike eyes.

Nelly clutched at her crop. She could have struck them.

Mrs. Fay made a queer little noise—not a sneeze or a laugh, just a splutter—and, in reference evidently to something that had gone before, inquired:

"What do they say?"

Tams, releasing the girl's hand, shifted.

"Well, you see the idea is so brand new that they don't know whether they are in for rotten eggs or the biggest hit ever."

"Dear me!"

"Yesterday, Goldburg, who is odiously familiar, clapped me on the back and said: 'Make it dance, old boy, make it dance. That's the stunt that'll get 'em!'"

Patiently Mrs. Fay put in: "I should think so."

"May I smoke?" Tams asked. "And somebody will," he resumed as he got out a cigarette. "Somebody will do it. That's inevitable. There's barely an invention that hasn't been bettered. There isn't one that couldn't be. Just now I'm ahead of this game, but though I can patent the process, I can't patent the idea."

Mrs. Fay, to whom that perhaps was Greek, exclaimed, "Oh, can't you?"

Tams puffed.

"No, and moreover it's all so simple. Not the machinery of course—that is a bit intricate—but the phonograph is mere a, b, c, and so is the rest of it."

"Including the gown?"

"What gown?" thought Nelly. "What on earth are they talking about? And why does that creature sit there like a bump on a log? I could bite a tenpenny nail in two!"

Tams spilled his ashes.

"Don't you like it? Why, I selected it myself. I saw it in a window."

"Oh," Mrs. Fay feebly protested, "I don't mean but what it shows a great deal of taste——"

"And all of it bad," Tams laughingly cut in. "Well, no doubt you are right. Whatever else I may be, I'm not a—what do you call him?—a Poiret. But that's just it. I would have liked a suggestion or two from your daughter, whose taste is faultless, but, it appears, she isn't in, and I have got to turn Gloria over to-morrow. She takes the title rôle."

"Gloria?" Nelly indignantly repeated. "Is that that creature?"

Tams threw away his cigarette.

"The Goblin Girl" is billed for the tenth of next month."

As he spoke, leaning forward once more, he again took the young woman's hand.

"Come, my beauty, we must go."

But his beauty made no reply, no movement even. Her head had not turned, as it previously had, slowly upward to him.

"Hello!" he exclaimed and dropped the hand, which fell limply. "She's run down!"

"What does he mean?" thought Nelly. "What on earth is he doing?"

Tams, who had extracted a key from his pocket, was poking it at the peacock girdle. He was turning it there. Then he moved closer, masking the creature. But almost at once he turned, and Nelly saw the lips part, saw the teeth, the point of the tongue, and heard the opening *sol bémol* of a cavatina.

A moment only. Tams fumbled at her again. Abruptly the mouth closed, the aria ceased. It was as if he had bewitched her.

Mrs. Fay nodded applaudingly.

"It is certainly wonderful. I never could have believed that a doll could be made to go on like that. And you say they want it to dance?"

A doll! Amazedly Nelly wondered whether she were going mad or only becoming sane. She could have screamed and, lest scream she might, she clapped a hand to her mouth.

A doll! The bewilderment of it made her dizzy. Without conscious effort, she saw the creature as she had that noon, shooting by like a comet; she saw her as she had at the post office, looking as if the ground were not fit for her to tread on; and she saw her as she had in that fancy ball of the imagination, taking him away.

Then at once an overwhelming relief poured balm all over her.

But in complex emotions the first to assert itself is humiliation. The relief passed, ousted by a sense of shame

that she had been tricked into betraying her feelings even to herself.

For it was a trick, she indignantly told herself, and, even otherwise, he ought to have known better. It was disgusting of him to have paraded that thing about like a joy forever and to have acted as if it were alive!

But she could act, too. She would show him and pretty quick!

Her crop under her arm, her head in the air, buttoning a glove as she went, out on the veranda she sailed.

"How do you do, Mr. Tams." With a little nod, a nod remote and quite infinitesimal, she threw at him those five small words and caressingly, in her most sugary way, smiled at her mother. "Don't catch more cold, dearest."

Across the veranda she sailed, floated over the steps, and on and up the path. There was a bit of wind, she noticed. She noticed, too, that the sun was going down. With her crop she decapitated a flower and, stooping, stuck it in her coat.

As she straightened, Tams was beside her.

"Nelly, I love you with all my heart and soul!"

Nelly looked up. The sky was a tent of various colors.

"Nelly, will you marry me?"

The wind sang about her like a flute.

A little later, when together they returned to the house, they found Mrs. Fay at the tea table.

Offering Tams a cup, the old lady said patiently:

"When you are quite ready, I hope you will take your beauty away. She's uncanny."

Tams smiled.

"There's somebody else that I'm going to take away."

Mrs. Fay, thinking, or affecting to think, of her treasure, started.

"Not Sarah?"

"Your daughter," Tams with fitting gravity replied. "Your daughter has promised to be my wife."

"Has she?" Mrs. Fay with amused, but affectionate interest, remarked. "One lump or two? Well, I can't hon-

estly say that I didn't suspect it. When is it to be?"

Nelly, contentedly helping herself to a caviar sandwich, answered for him:

"The day after the first production of 'The Goblin Girl.'"



BARS

WINGS may have been too eager,
But who are we to cry
Their weakness to the winds of earth
That tempered us their wrath,

When falcons still beleaguer
The battlemented sky,
Taking, between the sea and sun,
Their undisputed path!

Dear, we have known the wonder
Of the untraveled noon;
Dared dawn together fearlessly,
Motelike among the stars;

Looked down upon the thunder,
Drifted across the moon—
But, oh, I think our little cage
Had not so many bars!

LESLIE NELSON JENNINGS.

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More Super-Women

By Anice Terhune

Tullia d'Aragona:

The Siren of the Yellow Veil

Nay, never ask this week, fair lord,
Where they are gone, nor yet this year,
Except with this for an overword—
But where are the snows of yesteryear?
—*Ballad of Dead Ladies.*

ONE day early in the sixteenth century, a little girl of Palermo stood in the street haranguing a crowd of youthful ragamuffins. Not a word that she uttered was understood by the gaping, awed crowd, for she was spouting Latin like a college professor—and little Italian waifs do not speak classic Latin. But the children admired and approved, though they had no idea what it was all about.

The twelve-year-old orator grew more and more eloquent as she felt her power over the spellbound audience. She waved her arms wildly and raised her shrill, childish soprano until it penetrated to a garden near at hand. A door in the wall flew open.

"Signorina!" cried a horrified maid. "Come into the house at once! What do you with such dirty little companions?"

Kicking and crying—not speaking Latin now, but very babyish Italian—the little girl was hustled through the garden and into the house, where she received a good scolding for her democratic leanings.

She was Tullia d'Aragona, daughter of Prince Pietro Tagliavia d'Aragona. Of her mother, Giulia of Ferrara, the

less said, the better. She flashed and glittered through the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth like a tawdry imitation jewel beautifully wrought.

Her tinsel life has for its only excuse her daughter, Tullia, who came into the world in 1505, without benefit of clergy.

Tullia's unwed father took charge of the little girl's upbringing almost from the first. Regardless of bar sinister, she was educated as the daughter of a prince should be.

From babyhood she showed a marvelous mind, which was a source of never-ending joy to her teachers. Her mastery of the classics, her wonderful grasp of the most vital questions of the day, earned her her title of "The Aspasia of the Sixteenth Century," when she was still a slip of a girl.

Beyond all this was her most astonishing beauty and charm. All of our super-women have been found to possess peculiar attractions, aside from their intangible super-woman lure. In some it was beauty, in others intellect, in a few rare cases, sweetness of character, a wonderful voice, or the power of diplomacy.

In Tullia, all these gifts were united. "Her lustrous beauty," says a commentator, "her exquisite elegance of manner, her gentle, suasive imagina-

tion, and her perfect taste in dress, combined to make her the most accomplished woman of her time."

"It is impossible," said Trollope, "to imagine anything more charming or finished than she was. An accomplished musician, she spoke with grace and eloquence, so that, whether in light conversation or serious, she delighted and captivated her hearers like a second Cleopatra; and at the same time, her lovely and ever-cheerful features were not wanting in those more potent charms which admirers of feminine beauty were wont to look for in a beautiful face."

Needless to say, though Tullia was carefully guarded, her love affairs began before she was old enough to put up her hair—if, indeed, girls put up their hair at all in those days. She was not burdened with morals. She had her mother's precedent in that, and her free, untrammelled spirit soared gayly along its chosen path, happily oblivious to convention.

Tullia's earlier attachments, history hints at rather than reveals. She emerged from their murky, turbid waters more irresistible than ever, and plunged into the one great love affair of her life—that with Filippo Strozzi, head of the far-famed banking house in Florence.

"Strozzi," says Trollope, "was one of those marvelous men whose abounding vital energies enable them to unite in their own persons characters, pursuits, and occupations which might seem to belong to half a dozen different individuals. His political speculations and intrigues did not interfere with his much-loved literary pursuits. His free-thinking philosophy did not prevent his interest in religious matters. His vast banking operations were somehow made compatible with the career of a very notorious man of pleasure."

Strozzi fell madly in love with Tullia and she with him. They were kindred

spirits along every line. She was his hetæra—in other words, his adviser, his comforter, his entertainer, his chum. In spite of all this, their life together was full of ups and downs. Stormy quarrels—generally brought on by Strozzi's jealousy—tumbled on the heels of their vows of deathless love.

We have no reason to doubt that Tullia kept faith with Strozzi as long as their intrigue lasted, but it was not the fault of her crowd of adorers that she did so. They were always trying to supplant Strozzi.

Finally a particularly ardent lover from Rome challenged the banker to a duel for Tullia's favor. With characteristic independence, Strozzi firmly refused.

"I cannot live without the society of women," he said flippantly, "and Tullia is more to me than any one else. But I should be a perfect fool if I got into any such scrape for her or any other light-o'-love!"

Unfortunately for Strozzi, Tullia chanced to overhear this. Livid with fury, she had the strength of mind to keep silent, but she vowed vengeance, and quietly bided her time.

It was not long in coming. Strozzi led an insurrection against his lifelong enemy, Cosimo, Grand Duke of Tuscany. The revolt failed, and Strozzi fled for his life. Tullia, white-lipped, but with somber eyes flashing fire, went to the duke. To him she not only betrayed Strozzi's hiding place, but handed Cosimo a wad of incriminating papers that would have hanged Strozzi many times over.

Strozzi saved his enemies the trouble of killing him. Heartbroken at Tullia's perfidy, he committed suicide.

Tullia repented her insane act when it was too late. She had loved Strozzi with all her queer, irresponsible super-woman soul. She had stayed true to him an unbelievably long time—for a super-woman. Then, in revenge for

an idle slur, she had delivered her lover into the hands of his enemies. It was not a pleasant thought to wake up with.

Tullia left for Rome immediately. Once there, she fondly imagined that she had given up all interest in lovers forever. She developed her literary gifts to the full and established a salon. She wrote a book on platonic affection, which—according to one of the critics of the day—"had a wide and excellent influence." Unfortunately she found it quite impossible to practice the kind of love she preached.

The literary pose served as most attractive bait, and in no time at all her net was full of amorous, clamorous victims.

"She was a child of love, and lived in its service," says a contemporary writer, who was also a victim to her charms.

Her list of admirers included a coterie of most distinguished men. Prince Ippolyto de Medici prostrated himself at her feet. Ercole Bentivoglio neglected his political games to play with her soft-waving hair. Benedetto Varchi, the historian, deserted his wife for her. The poet Arrichi wrote sonnets to "her unforgettable eyes." Jacobo Nardi was another abject slave.

Among the lot, Pietro Aretino stands in the forefront. He was one of the most brilliant and scholarly literary blackguards of his time—famous, or rather infamous, for the devilish genius of his rotten lampoons and verses. That he could be very fascinating is evident, for Tullia graciously allowed him the run of the house.

About 1540, things began to get a bit warm for Tullia in Rome. She wrote a book called "The Infinity of Love," which got her talked about to a degree that made her decide, quite suddenly, to travel for a while. She wandered about from place to place, tarrying for a time in Venice, Bologna, and Ferrara.

Wherever she went, her beauty, wit, and charm were an open sesame. But her reputation tagged stolidly on behind her, and she preferred not to wait for it to catch up. So she kept moving.

Somewhere along the line, she picked up a property husband—one Silvestro dei Guicciardi. He proved very useful, in the same way that the property mother of a chorus girl is useful—he covered a multitude of sins.

After a time, Silvestro was so inconsiderate as to die, but Tullia exploited her widowhood and so managed to have a pretty good time without him.

Then, like a thunderbolt, came the heaviest blow of her life. She was summoned before the local council at Ferrara and told that she had been condemned to wear the yellow veil.

She would much rather have been condemned to death. For to wear the yellow veil was the greatest disgrace that could be put upon a woman. It bore the same hideous significance as the blue wig of ancient Rome and the scarlet letter of the Puritans. It was a brand, enjoined by the law, upon professionally notorious women of Italy. The yellow veil was a head covering with a stripe of gold a finger wide, worn in such a position that the stripe could be seen by every one.

Tullia had never dreamed that this ignominy could reach her. As a widow, she had thought herself perfectly safe. She wept, stormed, prayed. The council was torn by pity for the superwoman in distress, but was powerless to revoke its own act.

Then, in her despair, Tullia appealed to Don Pedro of Toledo. He was anxious to help, but did not know what to do. As a last resort, she turned to her old lover, Benedetto Varchi. He enlisted the sympathy of the Duchess Eleanora of Toledo—aunt of Don Pedro.

Tullia, crushed beyond belief, had

small hope of mercy. Like many women of her moral caste, she was superstitious and a fatalist. She believed that there was no hope left in life for her. But the kind-hearted Duchess of Toledo gave full credence to her show of repentance and determined to save her from this crowning humiliation. She finally succeeded.

From then on the grateful Tullia put herself under the protection of the duchess, who found her hands quite full. Tullia completely hoodwinked her by her pious talk, and whitewashed herself still further by writing her masterpiece, "*Guerriero il Meschino*," a romantic poem of thirty-six thousand lines and thirty-six cantos of octave rhyme.

Tullia's worshipers—repentant or not, she was never without them—compared this poem to the *Odyssey*, but the effusion was fairly crawling with faults. Tullia reveled in it. One can imagine her winking slyly to herself as she wrote in the poem's sanctimonious preface:

"It is for you, therefore, my gentle readers, to accept my good intentions and give all praise to God alone, from Whom comes all good and to Whom alone I am thankful for the good grace which has so enlightened me, while not yet overripe, but youthful in age, to bring back my heart to Him and make me wish and strive, as far as in me lies, that all others—both men and women—may have like grace."

"Poor dear Tullia's virtue runs away with her a little," said Trollope. "It is evident that there are to be no more cakes and ale. Her junketing days are done."

In spite of Tullia's worthy intentions, she frequently forgot her new character. Her bohemian spirit bubbled up geyserlike all through her poem, tearing the thin veil of piety into shreds. Presumably the good duchess did not read the "masterpiece," or if she did, it

was probably an expurgated copy, made especially for her benefit.

In spite of Tullia's delicate allusion to her "youthfulness in age," she was now nearly fifty. She had squandered her money recklessly as she had squandered her youth. Though still beautiful, she had little left to live for.

"I hope I shall not live to be really old," she said.

The shadow of the yellow veil never left her, try as she might to shake it off.

Of course there were always lovers—Tullia could not help drawing them as the Pied Piper drew the rats of Hamelin—but she was weary of it all.

Her last intrigue, that with Muzio, lasted five years. At the end of that time, Tullia's valiant scorn of money had left her penniless. Sick, deadly weary, she sighed and lay down to die.

"Dressed in a black serge garment," says an historian, "her hair wound simply around her head, her great, wistful eyes staring into vacancy, she lay, her exquisite body ruined by the ravages of a cruel disease."

Her pitifully few belongings had to be sold to pay her funeral expenses. Her last request was that she should be buried beside her erring mother in the Church of St. Agostino. Let us remember it to her credit.

Do you dislike her? Please don't. I know she was very, very bad, but I feel that she never had a chance to be anything different. Everything was done that could be to spoil her, both before her birth and after. And she had her good points. For example, when her confessor reproached her for her "bad influence" over the youths who sought her society, she retorted:

"At least I make them happy—that is something."

Then, when the game was all over, her only wish was to lie down to rest beside her mother, like a little tired child.



The Swing of the Pendulum

By Paul Hervey Fox

Author of "The Stone Serpent," etc.

IT was about ten o'clock of a warm summer evening when Noel Trent had his disastrous interview with Michael Goddard.

The Goddard country house overlooked the bay, and most of the weekend guests had gone down to dance at the boat club. Noel knew that he would find Michael Goddard himself in the arched stone passageway that gave upon the rear veranda. This was very cool, and full of mystery and silence. Goddard seemed to enjoy sitting out there every evening as he smoked a final cigar.

Noel was frankly nervous. That afternoon, after tennis, he had talked the matter over with Sylvia, detail by meticulous detail.

"You mustn't be afraid of father, Noel," she had said. "He really likes to be fought. He doesn't respect people who agree with him. I'm afraid he'll roar at you. And remember, whatever you do, you mustn't let him know you're going to be a doctor. He's always blamed mother's death on the doctors, you know. We'll have to prepare him later on by gentle degrees."

At times Noel found it difficult to understand Sylvia's profound love for her father. Yet in a queer way he, too, admired the bullying, irascible man with the cruel mouth and the heavy-lidded eyes. Michael Goddard was at least a dominant and arresting person-

ality, and not even his furious, implacable rages could destroy the memory of his generosity or his fine strength.

Unfortunately, several jarring incidents had that day driven Goddard into a black mood, and it was at the climax of the last one that Noel unwittingly made his appearance.

The dim light of a hanging lantern showed Goddard's shadowy bulk sunken in a deep chair. One hand gripped the padded side, the other threatened the figure of Alexis, the house man.

"You damned swine!" Goddard was shouting in his deep voice. "Out of this house! Get out! You're fired! Get out! D'ye hear me?"

The servant answered with some shrill, unintelligible line of invective. Goddard's fingers closed around a heavy ash receiver and sent it hurtling after the retreating back. Then he sighed and, breathing deeply, turned his head.

"Well, young feller," he growled at Noel. "You wanted to see me? What can I do for you?"

Noel stood silent for a moment of indecision. His pale, serious face and dark, straight hair shined in a gleam of light. He had worried so much about this interview, knowing that Sylvia would never marry him unless her father agreed, that, now that the instant had come, he felt sick and shaky. All

of his carefully prepared openings faded from his mind; he blurted out his request in one rapid sentence.

Goddard rested his chin upon his hand and stared at the floor.

"This is impossible!" he muttered in a lowered tone. "Impossible! You can't take my little girl away. It's not time. I'm not old yet. Not yet."

Noel found his voice and argued incoherently.

"What do you do?" Goddard suddenly interrupted with careless irrelevance.

"I'm a student."

"Ah, yes, a student. Well, then, what do you intend to do?"

Noel resented that heavy, contemptuous voice. Impulsively, half defiantly, he cried out:

"I'm a student of medicine. I'm going to be a doctor."

"You—what?"

Michael Goddard rose slowly to his feet, threw down his cigar, and stalked over to the young man.

"So," he said, deliberately working himself into a passion, "you're one of the breed that killed my wife, are you? You and the likes of you, with your monkeyshines and shams! I swore from that day I'd never have another such scoundrel inside my house! And here—by God!—is one of the crew under my roof now, and has the impertinence—yes, the impertinence—to want to marry my daughter! You stay here to-night. To-morrow morning you leave before I'm up. Else I'll have you thrashed, d'ye see? Thrashed and thrown out!"

Noel struggled between the desire to answer angrily and the knowledge that to do so would prove fatal to his chances. It was Goddard who took the initiative. Suddenly he swung his fist. Noel threw out his arm jerkily to ward off the blow, and his elbow caught the big man upon the chin. Then a very queer thing happened.

With an expression of something very much like amazement in his eyes, which looked into Noel and beyond him, Goddard swayed for an instant upon his feet. After that he went crashing backward to the floor.

Noel stared around dazedly. Then he whirled and sped to his room. With shaking fingers he opened his grip and brought out a little bottle of brandy. It seemed to take him a very long time.

When he returned with it at last, the very first thing he noticed was that Goddard was lying across the chair. It was clear that he had made an effort to rise and had fallen again. Urged by an impulse of fear, Noel put his hand on Goddard's pulse. It was quite still.

He jumped up guiltily at a sound. A man was advancing out of the darkness from the direction of the veranda. His stride was easy, casual. In one hand he held a burning cigarette. Noel recognized him as Charles Fellowes, one of the guests, an amusing bachelor of thirty, with crisp blond hair, sleepy eyes, and an affected drawl.

Fellowes came placidly up to Noel.

"Well?" he asked in his affable voice.

"He's dead," Noel said in a whisper.

"It was—it was apoplexy."

"Perhaps. But wasn't the apoplexy assisted? You see, I happen to have been out there all the time, and neither of you noticed me."

Noel brushed his hand across his forehead. He felt strangely confused, and yet his voice, when he spoke, was calm and matter of fact.

"Please don't think I'm trying to conceal anything. I'm not. My part in this was purely accidental. But I shall explain just how it happened."

"That would be foolish," said Fellowes gently.

Noel thrust his head forward slightly.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"A coroner's jury might find the ex-

planation unsatisfactory. They have a trick of emphasizing the wrong details. And you are, after all, the cause of Goddard's death. Almost anything might have caused it, of course, but it happens to have been you. And Sylvia Goddard might not—understand."

In spite of himself, Noel shivered.

"I propose to help you," Fellowes went on, as impassively as ever. "And so I think it'll be better if you don't explain everything. Unless, of course, you'd prefer having Miss Goddard hate you? No? Well, in that case, will you please ring that bell?"

Noel found his body obeying without any conscious direction of mind. He heard Fellowes calling loudly up the stairway for help. It seemed only a few seconds before the passageway was filled with scared servants and a handful of guests.

Mrs. Phillipse, a novel still in her hand, had halted uncertainly in one doorway. Old Gregory Holt pushed closer, peering with a frown. Back of him, with a mute, tremulous face, stood Sylvia Goddard, her eyes wide and frightened, her lips slightly parted.

Noel's heart smote him. Then he heard the clear, measured voice of Charles Fellowes commanding attention:

"I hope it is nothing serious. Will some one please ring up a doctor immediately? Mr. Goddard collapsed suddenly while Mr. Trent and I were sitting out here talking with him."

II.

Half an hour later, on a bench that overlooked the waters of the bay, Noel Trent turned to the man by his side.

"I have to thank you for helping me," he said, leaning forward, his hands clasped together. "It really wasn't my fault, as you saw. And I think that this is one of the cases in which a deception is justified."

Fellowes lit a match and held it to his cigarette.

"As a matter of fact," he murmured urbanely, "I am going to ask you for something more substantial than your thanks."

"Anything in my power I'll gladly do," said Noel fervently.

Fellowes laughed at that.

"You're very generous! I'm glad. You will need to be. Very well! First, I'm going to ask you to give up Sylvia Goddard, to go away, to leave her, never to see her or communicate with her again."

"What?" Noel cried. "I don't understand! You don't mean——"

"I mean what I say. And I hope you'll see the futility of arguing. I have merely to explain what I noticed from the veranda to bring about the same result. As it is, I'm giving you a chance to resign instead."

Noel sat very still, looking out across the water. Realization began to filter into his mind. He wondered why he was taking things so very quietly. He was conscious only of a dulled sensation, like that of a man who has been drugged.

"This is blackmail," he said at last.

"Of course." Fellowes puffed the smoke from his nostrils and watched it vanish into the darkness with elaborate interest.

"Why—why are you doing this?" Noel cried, excitement finally leaping into his voice. "If you are in love with her, why don't you play fair? And if you wished to get rid of me, why did you advise me not to tell what happened back there in the passageway?"

"For a very good reason," the slow, pleasant voice answered. "You see, I may have to ask other favors of you later on. You would be very convenient. Naturally, if you prefer it, I'll go back and do what you yourself intended before you stopped to think. I'm afraid the story may cause some

indignation. All murders are accidents, according to the murderers, you know. You had a quarrel with Michael Goddard. You struck him, unintentionally of course—they all do—and his heart failed him at the shock. Not a first-degree case, by any means, but one that, with proper assistance on my part, would surely put you in a very unpleasant place for a very long time."

Noel Trent lifted his head sharply.

"Very well, let it be that then. I'd rather go to jail on your perjury than let you bleed me! I didn't know there were people like you alive!"

Fellowes tossed his cigarette far away and rose to his feet.

"As you please," he said in a tired voice. "I can honestly tell you, however, that I don't enjoy informing Miss Goddard that you are her father's murderer. She'll probably take the news rather hard."

Before Fellowes had strolled halfway back, Noel Trent hailed him.

"Stop!" he called, and ran after the waiting figure.

"I'll do anything you ask," he whispered. "Yes, anything, only don't tell her. I can't stand that! Sylvia mustn't know. I'll go away. I'll not see her again. I——"

He broke off helplessly, with a despairing gesture.

Fellowes smiled.

"What a sensible chap you are!" he drawled with warm approval.

III.

The car halted at the curb, and the girl opened the door and called clearly:

"Noel! Noel Trent! Oh, Noel!"

A young man with dark hair and a set face halted irresolutely, and then moved slowly toward her. He walked as if heavy weights were chained to his legs, holding him back. His face was quite white.

The girl held out her hand, surveying him with puzzled, hurt eyes.

"Where have you been, Noel?" she asked. "I've tried everywhere to find you. You sent me that letter after father died, and I couldn't understand. Then, when I wrote you, you mailed all my letters back unopened. Noel, what did I do? What happened? Won't you please explain? I haven't seen you for three whole years, and I've so much to tell you!"

"Nothing happened," he said tonelessly. "And there's nothing to explain."

"Then you're still angry with me? You hate me? Why? Do you think it's fair not to tell me why?"

He shook his head slowly, and his eyes lighted with something like a smile.

"No, Sylvia, I don't think any one could say that I hate you. By rights, you ought to hate me. But everything's impossible—now. I can't tell you. It's just that we mustn't know each other any more."

She stared at that, but he did not meet her eyes. For a long moment, there was silence. Then her lips quivered, and her chin went up in pride.

"I see," she said with a very clear enunciation. "I see. Good-by, Noel. I'm sorry I bothered you. And you needn't be afraid of my troubling you again."

Noel Trent walked on dully until he had reached his apartment. His face was curiously lined, and his eyes were somber. He drove his mind into an apathy that he might not think. For three years, he had not seen her. It had been very hard not to tell her, not to rid himself of the whole wretched story. And yet it was better to have her misunderstand than to have her despise him.

He looked back over the ironic record of the last two years. He had obtained his degree from the medical

college, and after the apprenticeship of a clinical appointment, had set up in an obscure practice. He was a good doctor; his patients liked him, but they were of the poorer class who could pay only small fees, if any. Somehow the life had been taken out of his hope, the ambition been killed in his heart. Always, in the back of his consciousness, he was aware that there was a greedy man waiting to snatch eagerly whatever he might amass. It was so useless. Fellowes had never permitted him to rest.

Indeed, he seemed to regard him now with an oddly motivated hate. Noel Trent had only one satisfaction, and yet that satisfaction was the chief cause of his distress. He knew that Sylvia Goddard had persistently refused Fellowes. The latter, in his disappointment, had come to find a savage, malicious pleasure in tormenting the man he considered responsible.

In Noel's mail this very evening was one of Fellowes' polite, insulting notes, naming a day early next week for an appointment. It had become a custom with Fellowes to summon Noel to him and coolly name his demands. Sometimes these were for money, sometimes for some trivial, humiliating service. Noel found himself sent on petty errands like a boy, found his whole life delivered up to the whim of the man who perpetually menaced him with his secret.

"You're the best valet I could possibly engage, my dear chap, and you're so much cheaper," Fellowes had sneered once.

Noel remembered a thousand similar insults that he had borne unflinchingly. Fellowes had learned that Noel was ready to sacrifice anything rather than have Sylvia Goddard learn what had occurred that warm summer evening many months ago. Noel had made of his deception a fetish for which he was ready to endure any penalty. And

Fellowes had found an equal obsession in discovering to what limits he could push the younger man.

They were very wide limits, and he kept Noel down to a miserable living pittance. There were times when the latter thought of making away with himself, but there were never times when he meditated a public admission of his share in Michael Goddard's death. Always the thought of Sylvia seemed to restrain him, seemed to fill him with a stoic acceptance of martyrdom.

Yet to-night it was particularly hard to bear. He had seen her by chance after so long a time. For his own sake, for his own courage, he had sought to avoid her. He had not dared to open her letters for fear of surrendering to his own weakness. He had killed her father; that he had done so accidentally was neither here nor there. He must never see her again. Transcending the pain was the knowledge that Fellowes had never won her, the suspicion that she had not forgotten, that she still cared for Noel Trent.

When he returned after dinner that evening, a woman was waiting to tell him that her husband was sick of a fever. Could the doctor come immediately? Noel welcomed the work as an anodyne. He had dreaded the long evening alone with his thoughts. Without a word, he seized his hat and bag and accompanied the woman.

IV.

If he had desired something earnestly to engross him, he had his wish. The patient was a stranger to him, and when Noel reached his bedside in a dingy room off Third Avenue, he found that he had a bad case of pneumonia on his hands.

He threw himself wholeheartedly into the task. The man was delirious, and too ill to be moved. Noel dis-

patched the woman for such things as were necessary, and when she returned, gave her directions. She was too ignorant, or too tired, to understand thoroughly, and Noel, secretly welcoming the demand upon his energy, worked far into the night.

Toward dawn, the sick man's temperature showed signs of improvement, and Noel left, promising to return the next day.

He did so, and found his patient making a swift recovery. When Noel called a third time, a few days later, the man was already sitting up in bed. His eyes gazed at Noel with a curious intensity. He seemed to be remembering something. He spoke in a slow, arduous whisper.

"Doctor, I've seen you before, but you don't know me. My name is Demarco, Alexis Demarco. I was employed for a time by Mr. Goddard. I have seen you there."

He paused and, gathering breath, continued:

"You saved my life the other night. I know. You did it from kindness. Perhaps I can do you one little, small favor. Listen. I can tell you something which maybe you don't know."

When the man was through speaking, Noel Trent rose excitedly to his feet.

"Why didn't you tell this before?" he cried. "Why did you keep it a secret? Good God, how I've suffered!"

"It was no affair of mine," said the man in his whisper of a voice. "Why should I mix myself up in trouble. It's different now. You saved my life."

V.

On the afternoon appointed in the letter, Noel called upon Fellowes in the latter's bachelor apartment. He wore the same embittered air that he usually displayed on these visits.

Fellowes, enjoying himself immensely, pointed to a chair.

"You may sit down if you like," he observed. "I have something to tell you. You broke your word—you met and spoke to Sylvia Goddard. What have you to say?"

"I couldn't help it," said Noel with a gesture. "I ran into her by chance. I didn't mean to. It was impossible not to shake hands. But I told her I wouldn't see her again."

"Yes, I learned as much. And on that account I'm not going to hold your slip against you. Besides, I'm rather glad you did meet Miss Goddard. It cleared up many things. It merely required that meeting to convince her that you are not the man she once took you for. She has recovered from her early illusions. She has consented to become my wife."

Suddenly Noel smiled. The smile deepened; his eyes twinkled; he burst into a harsh laugh.

"I'm afraid I shall have to prevent the marriage," he said grimly.

Fellowes gave him a curious look.

"I advise you to control your temper," he drawled. "No doubt this news is unpleasant to you, but it can be made even less pleasant."

"Perhaps," said Noel crisply. "But I think I ought to tell you a little story without further delay. It may clear up several things. And I have no doubt but what it will amuse you. It is a story about the late Mr. Goddard and—his murderer."

Fellowes shot a sharp glance out of the corner of his eyes, and his body seemed to grow a little tense.

"You see," Noel began quietly, "there was once a poor devil of a servant who was ill and needed a doctor. He was so grateful to the doctor, when he recovered, that he told him a pretty little story as a sort of payment.

"It appears that this servant was once employed by a man who had a very high temper. We will call that man—Smith, let us say. One evening,

when Mr. Smith was in one of his tempers, he discharged the servant. The latter, planning some vague retribution, did not leave immediately, but hid himself near by. He saw something that was quite interesting.

"Apparently just as he had left, a young man had entered. The young man, in the course of an argument with Mr. Smith, accidentally struck him. Then the young man rushed away for a flask of brandy. While he was gone, Mr. Smith recovered consciousness, and here is the most interesting part of all.

"It appears that a third man entered in that interval, a man whose note was held by Mr. Smith, and who at this very time was lurking not far away. He had seen what had happened. He took a large chance and got away with it—for three years. He laid hands on Mr. Smith at this critical moment and with all his strength threw him to the floor. And then——"

"It's a lie!" said Fellowes in a thickened voice. He moistened his lips with his tongue. "You don't think any one would believe that ridiculous lie, do you?"

"I think twelve people will believe it," Noel answered, "and that is all that will be necessary. In fact, my

dear Fellowes, it's my turn. I've got my witness, and I've got you. And your bluff won't help you."

"What—what are you going to do?" stammered Fellowes.

Noel drank in the picture of his fear. It was the first time that he had ever seen the other give way genuinely to an emotion. It was very pleasant to his eyes.

"Well, I'm going to do many things. I am not, however, going to have you arrested. Not yet—at least if you behave properly. First of all, of course, it will be necessary for you to break your engagement with Miss Goddard. I don't think she ought to marry a murderer."

"And you—you——" Fellowes began falteringly.

Noel nodded, looking into the eyes of the man who had dragged him down to unhappiness, who had browbeaten him, cheated him, tortured him so exquisitely. It was his turn now to recover all that he had lost. He wondered if he had sufficient cruelty to exact the penalty by the same method.

"Yes," he repeated softly, "I don't think she ought to marry a murderer. It will be preferable for her to marry a—a blackmailer."

RESURGAM

YOUR child I was—yet To-day's doubting daughter.

When you had left me motherless, alone,
Heaven's courts I stormed like Brooke—lost, golden singer—
"An idle wind blew round an empty throne!"

But lives there nothing now, dark flower of woman?

Your olive, brown-eyed beauty Raphael drew,
Your days that bloomed like fair and cherished gardens?

Oh, heart of laughter, tender heart and true!

By my own love that safe enshrines my mother—

Death cannot kill it nor the dust reclaim—

I dream her love, though naught else be immortal,

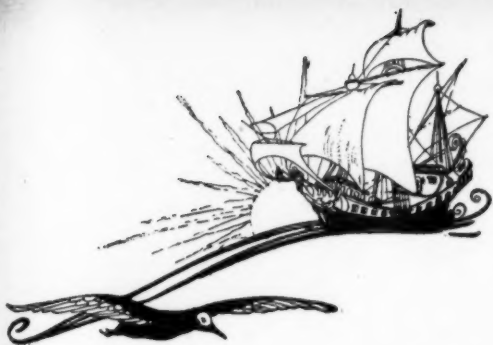
Still lights and warms my heart with golden flame.

MARGUERITE MOOERS MARSHALL.

The Joyous Dreamer

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Richard Mountgomery, a young soldier of fortune, has succeeded in forming a company to develop a valuable property in Colombia. Richard and Lycurgus Robinson, through whose aid the necessary backing was secured, are to be in charge of the enterprise. There is little sympathy between the two men, Richard being an aristocrat of the aristocrats and Robinson a vulgar little bounder, but Robinson's wife, Alice, is madly in love with Richard. This is no new experience for him, as there has never been a time in his life when some woman was not in love with him. He himself is fundamentally indifferent to women, though he accepts their devotion for what it is worth to him. On the night before he and Robinson are to sail from Panama for Colombia in their little yacht, he catches a glimpse of a woman in black coming down the steps of the hotel. Her sophisticated beauty catches his fancy, and he regrets that he is leaving so soon that he will have no chance to meet her. Before the party has been in Colombia many weeks, a mysterious cablegram for Robinson recalls them to Panama. Richard is puzzled, but does not force an explanation, as he does not care to have a fuss with Robinson, and his invincible confidence in his own luck leads him to feel that everything will come out right in the end. He is, however, worried and angry when, upon their arrival in Panama, Robinson announces that Talbot, one of the big men of the company, is coming down to make an investigation of its affairs. Richard realizes that Robinson must have messed things up somehow, but just at this point he meets the woman in black, and everything else is driven from his mind. Thérèse Kennedy, the French widow of an American, is all that Richard has ever dreamed a woman could be—young, beautiful, cultured, sophisticated. From the moment of their meeting, they are fascinated by each other and seek every opportunity of being together. Three people watch their intimacy with alarm—Alice Robinson, because of her love for Richard; Robinson, because he is infatuated with Thérèse himself; and Señor Garida, son of the President of Panama, who wants to marry Thérèse, and has a half promise from her. Finally Alice hits upon a plan for breaking up the affair. Robinson will guarantee to get Richard out of the way if Garida will give Robinson a concession for a race track in Panama. The money he can raise on this will enable him to meet Talbot's investigation, the Colombian deal will go on, and Richard will be sent back to the property. It happens that the date of Talbot's arrival is the date upon which Thérèse has promised to give a definite answer to Garida. She has made up her mind that it must be yes, since she has almost run through the little capital left her by her husband, and is not likely to have a better chance to provide for her future than that offered by a marriage with Garida. The day before Talbot is due, she and Richard go out for a last trip in the yacht together. That trip convinces her that uncertainty with Richard is more to be desired than certainty with Garida, and she and Richard make glowing plans for a life together. Unfortunately a storm delays their return, and it is long past the hour of Talbot's arrival when the young couple reach Panama. In the meantime, much has happened. Garida, wild with rage over Thérèse's escapade, has vented his wrath upon Robinson by tearing the race-track concession into bits. Knowing that he cannot face Talbot without it, Robinson, with Alice, has made a swift get-away to South America, leaving word at the hotel that he has gone to Colon to sail for New York. Talbot, arriving and learning of this, has started back at once for Colon. There is nothing for Richard to do but follow them. Thérèse decides to go along, and Richard rather reluctantly consents. They just catch the New York boat at Colon, and are not aware until after she has sailed that neither the Robinsons nor Talbot are aboard, Talbot having returned to Panama as soon as he realized that he was following a false trail.



The Joyous Dreamer

By Vennette Herron

Author of "When Sirens Clash,"
"Lolita," etc.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AND thus it was that the three comrades, Thérèse, Richard, and Booze, came up to New York, leaving a trail of gossiping and head-wagging in their wake. Clack, clack, clack went women's tongues, from end to end of the Canal-Zone line. The Robinsons had done their work well, but their revenge lacked savor, for its victims, en route for New York, neither knew nor cared.

Their trip was uneventful. The weather was fine and the sea calm. Thérèse traveled as Mrs. Kennedy, and both she and Richard conducted themselves so discreetly that the other passengers suspected nothing more than a shipboard flirtation. Like the true adventurers they were, they accepted the unexpected as the natural and went on with their life as simply as if carrying out a long-made plan, but with keener enjoyment. They spent their days talking together, making all sorts of plans for the future.

Thérèse discovered what were the boy's favorite authors—that he was fond of history and philosophy and that satire was his dear delight.

She made other discoveries, too, for she was beginning to view Richard from a different angle. At first both of them had been so absorbed in the exciting possibilities of their relations with each

other that they had temporarily excluded outside persons and interests, but now there was no more uncertainty. For the present, their lots were definitely cast together, and they could afford to look about them and consider other things. They enjoyed each other's society as much as ever, but no longer felt the necessity of spending every instant together in fear that it might be their last. So that, in spite of their long hours of conversation, Richard found time to chat with some of the men, to ingratiate himself with most of the mamas, and to exchange scraps of merry badinage with a few of the pretty daughters. Thérèse had a courteous word for every one, but she took less pains to be pleasing than did her companion.

"Richard," she said once to him, "you're so surprising. You hate being bored, and yet sometimes you'll sit patiently for an hour, listening to some old fogey's dull tirade."

"But that's easy, honey," replied Richard with a grin. "All I have to do is to say, 'Indeed!' or, 'My word!' at appropriate intervals, and I can go right on thinking about anything I like. It never pays to make an enemy, Thérèse, when, by simply keeping still, you can make a friend. And if you never omit any of the little courtesies that cost no effort, you can get by without doing

any of the big things that take a lot of trouble. Haven't you learned that?"

"Richard, I begin to see that you are an efficiency expert on methods of living."

"We-ell, I try to use such talents as I have," drawled the young man. "And you never know when a friend is going to be useful. That old codger whom I was talking to this morning, for instance, is as big a bore as they make, but he's also vice president of one of the biggest importing companies in New York, and I just happened to give him some information about Colombian ivory nuts that left him with the impression that I know a lot more than I do. Now, if I should ever need a letter of introduction or something like that, there's some one I could go to."

"One of the first things you must learn, Thérèse, is to get all the fun you can out of the present and at the same time give thought to the future."

Richard said no more at the time, but Thérèse had learned that, besides the merry boy, there was a resolute man, plotting and biding his time, within the shell of Richard, and from that moment she began to ponder over which was real, the man or the elf, and whether in the end one would conquer the other. She decided that he was even more of a mystery than she had at first imagined and determined to solve him if she could.

CHAPTER XIX.

Arrived in New York, Richard and Thérèse established themselves as Mr. and Mrs. Montgomery. Since they could not afford a smart hotel, they took three furnished rooms in an old-fashioned lodging house and converted the central one, between their bedchambers, into a comfortable living room.

Richard's first concern was to settle matters with his company, and the result of that settlement was characteristic. Starting out with the assumption

that a gentleman's word should be all-sufficient, and compromising to the extent of wheedling and cajoling the several corpulent capitalists whom he found in session at the company's headquarters into a listening humor, Richard ended by throwing their final offer in their faces and refusing to treat with them further.

The whole affair dragged, of course, over a period of several weeks. Talbot arrived in due time, and then there were books to be examined and cables to be sent and a general pother to be gone through with, before it could be determined, to the satisfaction of every one, that all the large sums of money missing were in the possession of Lycurgus Robinson, then in parts unknown, and that he alone was responsible for the entire misconduct of the business. Eventually, of course, Richard was exonerated completely, but not before he had been forced into a lot of talk and explaining, which he loathed, and subjected to some suspicion and research into private affairs, which he found intolerable and which made further connection with the company, to his mind, impossible.

Their investigation of his end of the business dealings was legitimate, if unpleasant, but their prying into his escapade with Thérèse, merely because it had occurred at an unfortunate time, was not to be endured. And as for his running away from Talbot, that was a joke that should have been plain to the most obtuse. He offered to sell out his stock at a figure they could not refuse to accept, and departed in high dudgeon. The company would have been only too glad, at the last, to have had him consent to go back, for although they had the money, the actual knowledge of the country and the proposition were Richard's, and his going left them somewhat in the lurch. However, "Hang it all!" he made reply to their advances. "You have no sense of humor—not one of

you—and it's too beastly annoying!" and he walked out of the office and home to Thérèse, wearing a beaming smile to cover an uncertain temper.

It was not that he brooded, as some men would have done, over his several years of wasted labor, or that he was consumed with regret for the mistakes he had made and that he clearly recognized. On the contrary, he gave little thought to these matters, but nursed a boyish hurt because of his present inability to live up to the brilliant picture which he had painted for Thérèse, and, combined with that, he had an uneasy feeling that he had let himself in for something that might turn out to be a heavy responsibility. It was one thing to run off with a girl in the tropics, with plenty of money in prospect and with everything conducive to romantic adventure, and quite another to be stranded with that same girl in New York, especially since her previous adventuring had consisted of only in the taking of chances, without any experience of the ill effects sometimes resulting therefrom.

However, he still found her immensely attractive, and it was a genuine pleasure to have her eagerly awaiting his return and tactfully curious over the outcome of his affairs. He told her everything, and she exclaimed and condemned, sympathized and agreed, at exactly the right points. He was beginning to feel soothed and placid once more.

"We've over a thousand dollars still, between us, so there's nothing to worry about," said Thérèse. "We can go on that comfortably for two or three months—living like this—and long before then something good will have turned up."

"That's true," assented Richard. "I should worry, honey. I'll think up a good plan in a little while, and in the meantime we'll have some fun. Do

you want to go on living here, or would you rather take an apartment?"

"Oh, here," answered Thérèse promptly. "We're comfy, and I don't know anything about keeping house, and we'd have to hunt up servants. It'd be a lot more expensive, and we haven't any furniture. I sold all mine."

"So did I. I had a lot of good stuff that I brought from home—some things you would have liked, too, dear—but I let the whole lot go when I started for Colombia."

"It's better, anyway. It'll only be for a short time, and then we'll go back to the tropics."

"Is that what you want to do?"

"Yes."

"All right—whatever my lady says goes. We'll do it."

"I love new experiences and this will be so quaint. I shall feel like a real bohemian."

"You may feel like one, but you certainly won't be one. Thérèse, I hate that word!" Richard's face was flushed and his eyes were angry. He went on savagely, "Girls make me tired! They go to a studio, with rugs on the floor that cost hundreds of dollars, and eat caviar and sip champagne, with the lights turned low, and say, 'Isn't this too deliciously bohemian? I should love to live this way!'" Richard, even in his anger, mimicked the gushing voice of an ingénue and swished an imaginary skirt so that Thérèse could actually see the fluffy débutante. "But wait till they have to live in a dirty little dump—maybe ten feet square—with a bare floor and a bed and a table and no way to keep warm and nothing to eat and no money to get anything!"

"Richard—you're so very bitter! Do you mind my asking—did you ever live that way?"

"Yes," he said grimly, "I did."

"When—where?"

"Here in New York—about five years ago. I didn't have anything to do, and

my money was all gone, and I lived like that for six months."

"Was there—a little grisette?"

"Of course. We had a room about as large as our bathroom, and half of the time nothing to eat. She had only one dress. I remember one day we decided that the time had come when that dress would have to be cleaned, so I took it out, and she sat on the bed, wrapped up in a blanket. There wasn't a cent left to buy food, but I saw a man distributing samples of chocolate, and I followed him around until I got several of them and then, on the way home, I found a quarter, so we had quite a feast."

"Oh, Richard!"

Thérèse's eyes were full of tears. That he should have been hungry did not seem nearly so terrible as that he had been in such a pathetic, humiliating position, and she told him so.

"That seems the worst of it on looking back. I hope it seemed the worst at the time," he said naively. "But, believe me, Thérèse, if I were a judge, and if a man had committed the worst crime on earth and could prove that he'd done it because he was hungry, I'd acquit him."

Thérèse, with her eyes on his face, knew how he must have suffered, although he said no more.

"What did you do? How did you live at all?" she asked.

"I hocked all my clothes—wrote a little—mostly lay around, like the rest, and dreamed. Finally I got out of it, and I never want the experience again—and I certainly don't want you to have it. Now do you see how ridiculous it is for you to talk about bohemism?"

Richard remained gloomy and forbidding until after dinner. Thérèse hardly dared to speak to him, so wrapped up was he in hateful memories. They dined at a little Italian restaurant and dawdled long over cof-

fee and cigarettes. Suddenly Richard broke from his reverie into a boyish, reminiscent smile.

"You know, Thérèse," he said, "after all, I'm glad I have a lot to remember. I've always had a horror of growing old without the satisfaction of having lived."

"Good coffee and plenty of cigarettes can make you appreciate even bohemia," laughed Thérèse.

"Well, it wasn't all bad," admitted Richard with a sheepish grin. "Some of the chaps were clever. They'd make verses and say wittier things than you hear at a good many tables. Most of the outfit, though, had never known anything better. And you know, Thérèse," he went on reflectively, "it's surprising and rather touching how much such people seem to like you. They always took it for granted that some day I'd drop out and go back to my own kind, but when the time came, they really seemed to feel badly. The little girl almost cried her eyes out, though she knew from the beginning that I'd go. Funny, isn't it?"

"Richard, didn't you ever feel sorry to leave any one?"

"Yes, of course. I felt sorry to leave them, in a way, but I was jolly glad to get out of it all. Really sorry? No, Thérèse, not the way some people are. I don't usually leave any one I care for, as long as we're having a good time, and, if we're not, why stay? Life's too short to spend with people who give one no pleasure, while there are plenty of others who can. Why should one mourn over parting, after one's had a good time and it's over, any more than one cries after eating a piece of cake, because it's gone? I've had a lot of fun out of life, Thérèse, and I expect to have a lot more. Everything's comical, if you can only see it that way, and the best fun of all is to laugh at yourself, when you've once learned how. I'll take you to see a chap to-night who

lives on the verge of bohemia, but he's a plutocrat compared with the kind I lived among. Would you like to go? He's an old friend and would be delighted to see us."

"It would be great fun."

Richard was in high spirits now, and they set off. Thérèse was full of curiosity and asked innumerable questions. Hugh MacDonald, Richard said, was a Scotchman who had lived many years in India. He had somehow drifted to New York and was living in a little apartment far uptown.

"What does he do?" asked Thérèse. "Is he an artist?"

"Oh, he paints a little and writes a little. He's tried stunts on the vaudeville stage and, if he gets very hard up, he put on the gloves in an amateur bout. Versatile chap, you know."

They arrived, after an interminable journey in the subway and a short walk, at MacDonald's quarters. The man himself opened the door for them, greeted Richard with surprise and delight, and acknowledged his presentation to Thérèse with quiet cordiality.

"Come in, Mrs. Mountgomery," he said. "I've some friends whom you'll enjoy meeting, I think, and I know you'll love my cat. And where have you come from this time, Dick? The last I heard of you, you were in the wilds of South America."

They passed down a long, narrow hall and emerged in a sitting-room which seemed to be filled with arms, legs, and tobacco smoke, for the room was not large and contained several pieces of furniture, upon which sprawled and lounged four or five men, all puffing at pipes or cigarettes. There was a general scramble as Thérèse entered. One man got up from the divan, where he had been reclining; another slid off the big desk, the top of which was covered with clever cartoons and sketches in pen and ink; one rose leisurely from a mission chair before the grate fire; and

the last remained calmly seated on a soap box, drumming his heels.

The man off the desk proved to be Captain Dagnan, an English skipper who had been several times around the world and who was now engaged in writing up some of his experiences for a travel magazine. The one on the divan was a young engineer who had just returned from South America. He too, was temporarily trying to earn a livelihood writing up adventures for stay-at-homes, willing to get their thrills by proxy. The man who rose from the chair was a violinist with long, fair hair and a somewhat weak, effeminate face. The fourth man, who stuck to his box like a monkey chained to a perch, was a little red-faced, sandy-haired Englishman, clad in a soiled shirt, well-worn and very tight trousers, held up by a piece of rope tied around his waist, and a pair of beautifully embroidered Eastern slippers, belonging to his host.

"I don't know just what Phillips is," MacDonald said in answer to Thérèse's query, later in the evening. "He says he's an engineer and just returned from Mexico."

"But I thought you said he lived with you," said the girl.

"Oh, he does. I met him a few weeks ago, and he said he had no place to sleep, so I took him in and he's stayed. But I don't know anything about him."

"You've come at an opportune time, Mrs. Mountgomery," said MacDonald. "I'm making a fine curry. I put over a story last week and received a check to-day, and whenever I do that, we have a party."

"What do you eat between checks?" laughed Thérèse.

"Biscuits and bacon and tea and rice. Do you see Puss-puss?" In the loop of the portière dividing the room from the hall swung a great white cat, as comfortably as in a hammock. "She won't be petted, so there's no use get-

ting up to try. But she loves to be admired—just like her master."

Thérèse listened contentedly while the men's talk drifted about her. She had never heard such talk before. None of them set out to tell stories, but they illustrated their conversation by casual references to the most outlandish places and experiences.

She found, too, that she had still things to learn about Richard. They spoke of opium, and he described a den that he had frequented for a little time. They brought up the subject of agriculture, and Richard told personal experiences of farming.

"Have you tried everything?" the girl whispered to him when he came to sit by her.

"Everything I could—long enough to find out what it's like. How else can one learn to discriminate between what's worth while and what isn't? I don't want other people to do my living for me."

"Richard, you imp of dreams, where are you going to end?"

"Hanged if I know—but I'm having a good time along my way."

The talked ranged over the world, and all of them contributed except Phillips, who confined his remarks to bombastic statements of the great things he was about to do, thus giving himself the pleasure of talking without giving any one else information. Only one clew did he let slip as to his past experiences, and that was when he said, while complacently rolling a cigarette with exceedingly dirty fingers:

"I can't endure Mexican girls. They're not dainty enough."

Story followed story and adventure trod hard upon the heels of adventure.

"I suppose we'll all end as beach combers or as loafers on the benches in Madison Square, but we'll have done a few things first," said the engineer at length.

"I choose beach combing," said Rich-

ard. "At least I won't freeze, and I can have plenty of bananas and coconuts."

"You need have no fear of Madison Square," laughed Thérèse, "for, if you landed there, a whole train of women would march up bearing blankets and pillows and food and a tent and would transform the bench into comfortable quarters for you."

At last they fell to talking of writing, and all of the men, except Richard, united in saying that it was a most promising and delightful profession.

"Nothing gives one so much independence. You can go where you please and live as you please. It's the only thing!" enthused MacDonald.

"Why don't you have a try at it, Dick?"

"Perhaps I shall—when everything else fails. I did a little once—a long time ago."

"But I thought," ventured Thérèse, "that writing was a gift—a talent that one had to be born with. I didn't know that any one could just start in and do it."

"Sure they can. Why don't you try, Mrs. Mountgomery?"

"Don't you let 'em fool you, Thérèse. That's the way these blighters always talk. Any one can do it, but few of 'em can sell it after it's done."

"Oh, see here, we've sold a lot! I got a check myself the other day—for eighteen dollars. Dagnan and I went out and had lunch on it."

"Yes, but how often do you get those? Every day?"

"Well, no. But the time'll come when I can get eighteen hundred for every story I write. Wait and see!"

"That's all very well, but I think I'll stick to finance."

It was six o'clock in the morning when Richard and Thérèse finally started home.

"It was great fun," said Thérèse gayly. "I like the edge of bohemia."

"One can always have a good time.

"We do, don't we, honey?" replied Richard sunnily.

CHAPTER XX.

Thérèse and Richard continued to have good times throughout the spring. Their rooms were comfortable, old-fashioned, and airy and, if they were inartistically furnished and formed an ill setting for light-hearted romance, they could, believing the circumstances to be temporary, turn them into a source of amusement. They would look at the horrible curly-maple furniture, the lace curtains and Axminster rug, and chuckle with glee at the idea that they were actually living in such a place. Then they would spend a glorious hour refurnishing the spacious old rooms as they ought to be furnished and probably had been, in the days when the old house was a private mansion.

"Thérèse, are we different from other people?" Richard asked one day. "They go on filling the world with ugly things, and no one seems to care. I can't bear to be surrounded by hideous things that so easily might be beautiful—nor can you."

"But we'll have them all beautiful," said Thérèse happily.

They lived on high hopes these days and thrive in consequence. They rose late every day and had their coffee before the open fire in their sitting room. After that they would chat an hour or two over their cigarettes. Then Richard would have a romp with Booze, and man and dog would tear all over the place until both were panting with exhaustion. Next, the boy would bathe, dress, and go out for the afternoon on his quest after men with whom to talk over his various projects, while Thérèse would pursue her little feminine occupations. At tea time, he would return, and through the twilight hours they would drink tea and smoke and talk of their plans.

Sometimes they would be very serious; they would discuss all the questions of the day or their own and others' philosophy, and Thérèse would be again the slightly haughty, gracious lady, and Richard would grow up a little, too, and there would be between them a pretty formality as if Richard had dropped in to make a call. On other days they would frolic like two children. Thérèse would sit cross-legged on the divan, and they would amuse themselves with childish things—blowing soap bubbles, playing games, and nibbling sweets. On these days Booze would be especially happy, for a share in the fun would always be his.

"Yes, old fellow, you're always welcome," Richard would say when the little dog wedged himself up onto the couch between them. But Thérèse would pout and pretend to be jealous and would tweak his tail until he moved over to Richard's other side.

Then they would dress for dinner and go out to all sorts of places—sometimes to a smart hotel or café and sometimes to quaint little foreign restaurants, where the proprietors would learn to know them and would give them a welcome and a special dish.

One morning the boy sat back in his big armchair, looking very thoughtful. Thérèse was busy about the room, and Richard remained silent, apparently pondering over some weighty question. At length she completed her little tasks and came to sit near him.

"Of what are you thinking, dear?" she asked.

"For one thing, of how glad I am that you are a clever woman."

"And growing more so—thanks to you. Why, especially?"

"I was talking with a chap yesterday who told me some of his troubles. Why, when a woman is jealous, does she usually make herself as unattractive as she can by raising all kinds of a rumpus? Why doesn't she go about it subtly and

win out by making herself more pleasing? I believe that's what you would do, isn't it? But of course it takes a clever woman."

"I fancy I would," replied Thérèse calmly, "but I'm not apt to become jealous."

"No, that's another thing about you. No intelligent woman can expect to give a man everything that women can give—any more than a man can expect to be all in all to a woman. The best any one can do is to give and receive a little more than the others. Don't you agree with me?"

"I do," said Thérèse, smiling, "and it's not really a compliment to bestow all of one's attention upon the same object. If I wanted to be very flattering, I should flirt like the devil with a lot of men and then say, 'You see, all of these people like me, and I like you.'"

"Yes," went on Richard, "you're right, Thérèse. And—aside from flirtations—one has always old friendships that are of value still—even if one has married or——"

"Yes indeed," broke in Thérèse while she watched her companion through half-closed lids and lazily puffed at her cigarette. "Good friends are not to be lightly cast aside."

Richard waited a moment and then, "Speaking of friends," said he, "there's a girl that I ought to look up. She was awfully nice to me once—and I think, too, that it would give you some pleasure to know her, for she's really rather a remarkable musician. I fancy she'll be famous some day."

"She's a good friend of yours, boy?"

"Oh, not so specially—but we were both interested in music, and she had an attractive studio and used to give jolly little suppers. I happened to think that you might like to know her."

"I'd call on her at once, if I were you—or shall I? And we'll ask her to dinner."

"Very well, I'll hunt her up, if you

say so. You see, she's been a good little chum, and she's had a hard time getting along—and you know so well how to be nice to people. I'm not posing as a philanthropist, but I like to be kind to people whom I know deserve it."

"Yes, do bring her to see me." Thérèse was gravely cordial, but, after Richard had departed, she laughed softly and then looked a wee bit anxious.

Meanwhile, Richard left the house and went straight to Betty. He found her at home in her small apartment.

"Dick!" she cried when he opened her door, after a quick preliminary rap. "You didn't tell me you were coming!" Then she rushed into his arms. "Oh, but I'm glad to see you safe home again! Tell me about everything!" And she winked back a few tears, called forth by her happy excitement.

Richard kissed and caressed her and then sat on the couch, with one arm about her, while he told her of his adventures in South America. When an hour had passed pleasantly and little Betty was purring like a contented kitten, he said to her gently:

"You know you're such a shrewd little girl that I sometimes follow your advice—a remarkable thing for me."

"Oh, do you really?" gasped the girl in delight.

"Yes, really."

"Oh, when did you, Dick?"

"Well—for one thing, you've often said that I ought to have some one to look after me all of the time, haven't you, honey?"

"Yes," admitted Betty a bit tremulously.

"So I knew that you'd be more glad than anybody to hear that I have some one. You're the first of my old chums that I've hunted up to tell."

"You're married?" said Betty slowly, a little stiffly, and then drew herself away from him.

"Well—it looks like it," said Richard, pulling her back. "She's a good sport, Betty, and is going to like all of my friends—and I do hope you'll like her. I'd be so disappointed if you didn't."

"I don't suppose I'll meet her, Dick—very soon. I'm awfully busy."

"But not too busy to have some good times with me, now I'm back. And it will be nice for Thérèse, too. You see, she doesn't know any girls up here, and I knew I could count on you to be nice to her—for my sake."

"Of course, Dick," said Betty a little sadly, but quite puffed up with pride in Richard's confidence. "Are you very fond of her—or," with a ray of hope, "did she inveigle you into marrying her?"

"You never can tell how those things happen," answered Richard, leaving her the hope. "Come back with me now and have dinner with us," he went on, striking while the iron was hot.

"Are you sure she wants to know me?"

"Certainly. I spoke of you, and she told me to hunt you up and ask you as soon as possible."

"You didn't tell her——"

"Any of our secrets? Betty, how can you ask?"

"Well, wait till I change my dress."

"Now," soliloquized Richard while he waited for Betty to complete her toilet, "I don't see but what I've pulled off a good thing. I promised the little kid some good times when I came back, and I'll see that she gets 'em, and she'll keep on doing little things for me that Thérèse can't do. She'll be doing 'em for Thérèse, too, after a bit. Thérèse will be particularly gracious to her for fear I'll think she's jealous. It'll be good practice for her, and good for the kid to meet such a woman, so that makes it a good thing all around. It's easy enough to get on in this world, if

one knows how. Betty makes the best tea of any one I know."

And so Betty came to dinner, and took to dropping in often after that, for Richard was so natural and at his ease, and Thérèse so cordially charming, that she had a good time. She sometimes felt a little pang of envy when she saw Richard and Thérèse smile at each other with intimate comprehension and delight in some little thing, or when she overheard a scrap of their conversation which, when they spoke together, was often above her head, and she took a sly pleasure in parading her knowledge of the boy's tastes and habits. But hers was a generous nature. She did wish Richard to be happy, and frankly admitted to herself that Thérèse was a more suitable companion for him than she herself could ever have been. She had expected, from the beginning, that Richard would marry some time, and so, gradually, all feeling of resentment wore away, and she found herself thankful that he had married a woman who was quite willing to let her keep her little share in him.

Thérèse, meanwhile, decided that she had nothing to fear and was therefore amused by Richard's audacity and by the piquancy of the situation, for she was, of course, instinctively aware of Richard's former relations with the girl. At the same time, she grew rather fond of Betty and felt sorry for her. She realized, with her woman's intuition, that Betty's hurt, if not so deep as a more highly developed nature's would have been, was sincere, and she tried, by many little kindnesses and courtesies, to make it up to her, with the result that things went smoothly and that Richard, as usual, was made doubly comfortable. For while Thérèse gave him mental companionship, Betty ran his errands, mended his clothes, played to him, and made tea for him. The boy enjoyed it all, and chuckled occasionally

at the thought of his skill in the art of living.

One other thing he had to do and that was to write a difficult letter. His correspondence was voluminous, and he often said to Thérèse, "I'm writing to a little girl I knew in the West," or, "This one is to a girl in Philadelphia. She used to be a great chum of mine. Her mother serves the most delicious cakes." Once he said, "This one is to a girl I expected to marry at one time."

"But you broke it off?"

"Well, I let it wear thin."

"Does the girl know how thin?" asked Thérèse. "Have you told her about me?"

"Well—not exactly," said Richard easily. "But she'll find out in time."

On this particular occasion, Richard had a lot of trouble. He scowled and screwed up his mouth and nibbled his pen.

"You seem to be having a dreadful time, Richard. What's the matter?" asked Thérèse.

"Oh, I've a letter to write that bothers me a little. I've got to tell something to Helen. You know—I've told you about her."

"Not much. But what's the trouble? Are you afraid to tell her about me? Richard, I've a feeling that she's still in love with you."

"Nonsense!" answered the boy, looking highly indignant.

But the epistle that he finally sealed and addressed to Miss Helen Grant would not have sounded so reassuring, could Thérèse have seen it:

DEAR LITTLE HELEN: The fates seem to be against us, for although I'm back in New York, it will be impossible for me to come to see you for a long time yet. The Colombian affair didn't pan out as well as I expected, and you know as well as I do, dear, that I don't want to go home until I've made good. So be patient, little sweetheart, just a bit longer, and then we'll see what we can do. Write me how everything goes and give my kindest regards to your mother. As always,

DICK.

"Richard," said Thérèse after he had finished his writing, "are you sure that girl isn't still expecting you to come back to her?"

"Thérèse," said Richard suavely, "of course I know you're joking, but I wouldn't ask such questions if I were you. They sound more like a school-girl than a woman of the world."

Time flew. Richard and Thérèse went to theaters and to concerts and amused themselves generally. Their money dwindled rapidly, but what did it matter when their plans were so numerous and so promising? Those plans! How many they made and dismissed with a laugh when they fell through; it was so easy to replace them with others. At first they were all propositions for South America—mines, tagua nuts, railroads. Richard was ready to organize a new company for the exploitation of anything or everything. Then, as these things came to seem impracticable, he turned his attention to plantations.

"Just think, Thérèse," he said in his boyishly confident way, a way that made the matter appear, for the moment, an established fact, "how we can live on a big plantation! We can have a house like a dream—big and built round a patio—and plenty of horses and a little yacht and small boats for the river, lots of service and all the colonists to work the place! We can live like royalty! And look at the way people have to put up with things here—cooped up in apartments, no horses, no boats, office all day, cold in winter—while for the same amount of money and half the effort, they could have summer all the year round and nothing to interfere with their pleasure!"

Then, when that scheme failed to materialize, Richard laughed and said:

"I've been thinking, anyway, that if I must live off the land somewhere, it'd be better to have a small place up here. Of course it'd take as much money to

buy a small place here as it would to buy a big one down there, but look how much more you'd get! You could have hunting—not through the bush, but after a pack of hounds, with congenial company. You could have all that country life has to offer just the same and, in addition to that, you could have the city. I know myself pretty well, Thérèse, and I know that I require more than most men in some ways, although less in others. I don't care about show places, but I must have physical comfort, including plenty of luxury and beautiful surroundings, and, besides that, I must have mental stimulus, which can only be had through association with worldly people. Why, just to be able to go out to a club once a week and to sit down to a well-served meal and see the right kind of people around you, even if you don't know any of 'em, is a help.

"It's a great thing to travel—I want to do it myself—but you notice that when men who've lived in the wilds take vacations, they spend them in their favorite city, because in that way they can start where they left off and get what they want—mental stimulus, conversation with men of their own kind, men with ideas—quicker and easier than by going to new places, where they'd have to take time to make new friends.

"No, Thérèse, I don't see how one could do much better than to live the life of a country gentleman, just as they do at home. Suppose we try to get a little place near New York. It would have to be small, but we could have the details right and make it a regular little jewel box. I think I know a chap who might lend me enough to make a start—and then—"

Thus Richard talked, and when this plan, too, proved impossible of execution, he took it smiling, as he took everything and said:

"It's just as well, honey. I don't

suppose I'd ever be content to settle down. Think of the great, wide world there is to roam in! Now I'll tell you what I'd really like, and I think it's possible, too. I'd like to get a schooner—about a hundred-and-fifty-foot boat—and do trading among the islands and down the coast of South America. You could make it more than pay for itself any time, and what need to make a lot of money when you could have everything you wanted?

"Just think of the life one could live—always on the sea drifting here and there! You could have your cabin fixed up gorgeously with cushions and books and piano—everything! You could live in luxury. It would be just like the yacht you wanted, only that you'd make the boat maintain herself. It wouldn't take much capital. And to be master of one's own boat—Of all things in the world—outside of going home, which I can't do—I'd like that, wouldn't you?"

And so glowing were Richard's dreams, and so vivid was Thérèse's imagination, that they enjoyed these glorious plans and anticipations more than many people do realities.

But weeks passed, and nothing was accomplished, while their money was almost gone. Their clothes were beginning to grow a bit shabby, too. Thérèse was reduced to various subterfuges in making her wardrobe continue to meet all requirements. She began to worry a little. Once in a while she ventured to ask seriously what they were going to do.

"You should never ask questions when you can wait and find out some other way," was the gist of Richard's replies.

If the boy worried, he made no sign. His laugh was as ready as ever, and when he saw her downcast, "Don't worry, dear," he would say. "Something's bound to turn up. We'll be all

right," and Thérèse would gladly allow herself to be diverted.

Only once, when he came home late, looking rather white and tired, Richard let fall, a little ruefully:

"It seems, dear, that I wasn't cut out for business. I've tried a lot of things and had plenty of experience, but, when it comes to putting through a deal, I go so far and then I stop, or, if I seem to have put it through, I do some fool thing that spoils it. And if I have to work too hard or wait too long, I lose all interest in the game. You know that's what business is to me. It's a game, but one that I like to watch, not to play—unless it's an awfully big thing. I can't seem to make it an end in itself, but only a bore means to an end. No matter how hard I work, my heart is always on the sidelines looking on and thinking, 'What a silly ass you are!'

"It's really funny, Thérèse," he went on, laughing, "other men never expect me to be serious. When I go into a chap's office to talk business, he usually begins to tell me about his horses and his yachts and asks me out to lunch or to take a cruise, and we have a fine time, but it doesn't get us anywhere."

Thérèse was amused and rather proud of this trait in Richard. It pleased her that he was incapable of taking the money problem seriously. She liked the irresponsible, dreaming boy, so beautifully fashioned for a life of ease and pleasure that it seemed as if the world ought to recognize his need and give it to him. Still, there were moments when she admitted to herself that it was a little inconvenient.

One day she had an inspiration.

"Richard," she said, "you know what all those men at Hugh MacDonald's said—how any one can write if they set their heart on it, and how many advantages there are in writing as a profession? Well, I've been thinking, and it seems to me there's something in it.

You want to be independent of every one; if you earn your living writing, you are. You want to travel; if you're a writer, you can. You can go anywhere and live any way. If you make a big success, you make big money—as much as you could on any of your financial schemes—and it only depends upon yourself. It's an asset that you have always with you, unless you lose your mind, and then you won't care. Also, if you're a success, it gives a certain prestige and brings you in contact with interesting and intellectual people."

"True enough, honey, but how does this concern me?"

"Don't you see? If a special business had been created for you, it couldn't have been better. You must write!"

"But, Thérèse, you silly little thing, I can't write!"

"You said you did once."

"Just some little sketches that didn't amount to much."

"But you could do more."

"Thérèse, if I thought that I had the slightest chance of making good, I'd begin now—but I haven't."

"Why not? You have plenty of material in your various experiences and a graphic way of describing things. Write the way you imitate and you'll be a success."

"What would you have me begin on?"

"A short story, so you won't grow tired of it before you finish."

"Will you try one if I will?"

"But, Richard, that's different. I can't."

"As well as I."

"All right."

"Promise?"

"Si, I promise."

They began that very night, amid gales of laughter. To their surprise, they found the work itself intensely interesting.

"This was a splendid idea," said Richard. "Look at the fun we're having! And to think that we're going to be paid for sitting here scribbling! We'll do nothing but write from now on, and we'll travel all over the world and make stories about it. When we finish these, let's do a novel together."

They completed, each of them, a couple of short stories and started them out on their rounds, and then, with enthusiasm and confidence still high, they set out to write a book, much as if they were taking up a new game. After coffee each day, they settled themselves in big armchairs or Turk fashion on the divan, and made themselves quite comfortable with plenty of cigarettes at hand. Each would get out a great supply of paper and a big portfolio, and they would make a little ceremony of sharpening pencils and finally would begin to work. First they would write for a few moments; then Richard would stop to read what he had written to Thérèse; next she would tell him her plans for the following chapter; and then, together, they would decide afresh each day how they would spend the first installment of the money to be received for the novel.

"Writing a book is just like planning a masquerade," said Richard one morning, "it may not turn out as well as you expect, but you have a lot of fun doing it. Let's make several copies of the book and send 'em all out at once. It'll save so much time."

"What if all of the editors accept it?"

"Oh, I'd write to the one that paid the least and tell him that I was so sorry, but that my secretary had made a mistake and sent out a manuscript already sold."

"Here, Richard, try one of these candies. They're delicious. Now listen, dear. Let's talk seriously together and decide how we'll end it."

"Not seriously, above all things,

Thérèse. Let's start a new school and write about people who laugh and talk and have a good time as they go along—the way we do—instead of suffering everlastingly from *Weltschmerz*."

"Nobody'd publish it. They like stuff about ideals and the unattainable, and think it's immoral to be natural and happy the way we are. Truly, Richard, isn't it funny that if some one writes a book about a man and his love affairs, and makes it sordid and ugly, and crams it with horrible details, and makes every man and woman in it suffer physical and mental agony because they happen to be alive and human, people call it realism—particularly if it's translated from the Russian—and the author is a deep thinker and a great writer and is lauded to the skies as a benefactor of humanity. As if it were beneficial to gather statistics about the world's misery and scatter them broadcast to destroy the peace of mind of the few who might otherwise be happy!"

"But if some one should write a book about us and people like us, who drift through the world, finding pleasure all along the way, having more anticipations than regrets and escaping sordidness and punishment for the crime of living—about people who don't worry about life, but are always happy; about those who believe that the world was created for man's use and pleasure and who dare to use it, instead of allowing themselves to be crushed by it; about love that is free, so that it never hampers—the public would hold up hands of horror and say that it was immoral."

"It's true, honey. You can take the same plot and the same characters and have 'em do the same things and if, in the end, you say, 'They did this, but they were miserable. Isn't it shocking?' you're famous. But if you say, 'They did thus and so and were happy. Isn't it amusing and lovely?' you're suppressed. To read the much-lauded,

serious, realistic modern literature is like sitting at the gates of a lunatic asylum and listening to the inmates howl, until you believe that you live in a world of nightmares and ghouls and that you're one of 'em anyway, so why struggle against the inevitable? Or if, by chance, you get hold of something cheerful, it's so smugly and sickeningly saccharine that you return with relief to the nuts."

"But why is sorrow more real than joy? Why is suffering more moral than happiness—even the happiness that is possible for intelligent and fairly civilized people? Why is the man who exposes misery and makes one feel that world is a vile place to live in greater than the one who writes about freedom and joy and makes people feel that they could all live as simply and as happily as the birds, if they'd only start out and do it? If the world is full of misery, why is a man a hero for creating more in the shape of a book or a play to add to it?"

"Thérèse, we'll do it differently," Richard promised. "We'll write a book that will make all who read it feel like putting vine leaves in their hair and dancing down the street. If no one will publish it, we'll do it in verse—you can get away with 'most anything in poetry—and, if they won't accept that, we'll say that we translated it from an ancient Greek manuscript. If you can make 'em think that it happened a long time ago and very far away, they'll be sure to fall for it."

"Richard, you're a genius! Now I know what we'll do. I'll write about you, and you can just sit and say cute things for me to use for copy. Think what a saving of effort it'll be for you!"

"I've a better scheme yet. We'll get a phonograph and a moving-picture machine and then we'll sit and talk and have a good time, and the records will make up the book and the pictures will illustrate it, and we'll tell the publisher

that we'll furnish the illustrations free of charge if he'll print it. I know a man who'll get the outfit for me cheap."

"Of course you do. You always have friends wherever you need them. Why is every one so good to such an ungrateful little elf?"

"I just tell everybody, 'Please be good to me. If you don't, I'll wither.' And think how I'd look, Thérèse, withered!"

Richard humped himself up in a little ball on the couch, dropped the corners of his mouth, and proceeded to look like a pathetic child left alone in a closet.

Thérèse laughed until she cried.

"Oh, Richard," she said, "do you think anybody would believe that we were two about-to-be-famous authors, at work on the novel that is to revolutionize the age?"

CHAPTER XXI.

In spite of their nonsense, and interspersed with it, they did work and worked hard, and at last the book was done—a thing of froth and bubble, of light-hearted adventure in foreign lands and moonlight on tropical waters, of laughter and persiflage, with never a hint of regret or sorrow. It was a book of youth, of the eternal spirit of youth which can not be aged by knowledge or experience, and it was the story of Richard.

"I've solved the mystery of you, elusive elf," said Thérèse when they had finished. "You have the heart of a child and the brain of a man. If it were the other way around, it would be terrible, for you couldn't keep the things you love, but this way all creatures love you, and you don't care whether you keep them or not."

"Oh, I say, I'm not as bad as that!"

"It's not bad—it's delicious and adorable and perfect for you, but hard on those who have to love you."

"Why?"

"Because."

"The inevitable feminine answer."

"I venture to be feminine sometimes, in spite of your disapproval. Now where shall we send it?"

The momentous question was soon settled, and the manuscript was sent out. Its writing had taken several months, during which Richard had neglected his other affairs, and their fund of money had sunk lower and lower. They still had the same rooms, but they ate now at the cheapest places, except once in a great while, when they went out and spent on a good dinner all that a month's economy had saved them. Richard had pawned almost everything of value that he possessed, and Thérèse had done the same with many of her trinkets, but still they laughed, for they had sold one short story—receiving therefor a sum that lasted them nearly a week—the novel was finished, and although they continued to make fun of it, they knew in their hearts that it was clever and felt a secret confidence which their mocking assurance to each other belied.

It was late in the summer now and stiflingly hot. They had to make their own coffee over a tiny charcoal fire in the grate, instead of having it sent up from below, and, after it was made, they poured water over the fire to put it out. Since Thérèse had no money with which to bribe the servant, she had to wash up her own cups and perform innumerable small household tasks, to which she was unaccustomed. Her clothes had grown shabby for lack of proper care and replenishing. She had reached the point where she had only one presentable street frock. She was still dainty in her ways, but her cosmetics and toilet accessories had given out, and she had no money with which to replace them. She struggled to keep up, but matters were made more difficult for her by the fact that she

had never been taught to sew and had never before had to consider ways and means.

At first Richard thought it rather attractive to see her *en deshabillé*. She looked like an artist's model, as she sat curled up in a big chair, clad in a pink silk kimono with a rent through which gleamed a rounded white knee, her bare feet thrust into a pair of frayed satin slippers. But the picture lost its piquancy when the negligee became faded and ragged past repairing, and her little toes came through the slippers, and all novelty had worn away.

About this time, too, their landlord took to watching and spying on them. All the little privileges which their early generosity had won were taken away, and the man formed an exasperating habit of lying in wait for them with a very determined look on his face, on the days when the rent fell due. The book returned to them again and again, as one editor after another rejected it, for they were trying the magazines first, and Richard started out anew in his quest for something to do.

He had reached the point where he would gladly have accepted any position offered, but a position seemed impossible to obtain. Richard's clothes had grown shabby, too. He could no longer afford to have them pressed and cared for, and he had no money with which to create an impression. Neither of them had ever learned to economize, and many things that others might have done to mitigate their condition never occurred to these two. It would not have entered their heads, for instance, that Richard could undertake certain menial tasks, nor would they have thought it possible for Thérèse to wash their clothes or cook their dinners.

Still, they managed to keep on their rooms and to eat enough to live. They sold one or two more short stories, and pawned, piece by piece, their remaining stock of valuables.

The boy tramped the streets all day and came home each night white and tired, but smiling. But his laugh grew less ready, and he spent a good deal of time brooding.

Once Thérèse felt hurt at his abstraction.

"Richard, are you growing tired of me?" she asked wistfully.

"No, dear," replied the boy. "Don't I do little things to show that I like to have you here? Only I'm sorry that I ever got you into this."

"You do things, Richard—perfect things—but they never seem quite lover-like, because I know that you'd do the same for any woman who was near you and who needed it. You'd do as much for little Betty as you would for me—now wouldn't you?"

"Thérèse, do you think this room would look better if we put that table over there?"

"You haven't answered me. Wouldn't you?"

"Certainly."

"Why didn't you say so in the first place?"

"Because I thought you were being very silly and quite like every other woman to ask me."

Thérèse said nothing and bit her lip for a moment.

"I heard some news to-day," Richard remarked after a pause.

"What?" asked Thérèse a little sullenly.

"Our boat blew up—down near the property."

"What? The yacht—the one we went to the islands in?"

"Yes. The fools didn't know anything about a boat anyway, and they left her alone for weeks with only a native watchman. He smelled gasoline one night and went below with a lantern to look for the leak. Of course she blew up. The *muchacho* died, after a couple of days. It means a big loss to the company."

"I'm glad of it," said Thérèse, "after the way they treated you."

"Maybe—but I never wanted to take my revenge out on the boat. You know I loved that boat, Thérèse, more than most men love their wives. When I was down in Colombia, I used to spend hours alone on her, thinking how I'd fix her over and improve her and what I'd do with her later on. It rather hurts me to think she's gone."

"How you do love boats!"

"Yes, I do. I remember when I was buying this one. There was a schooner yacht that I liked—the *Water Witch*. She was a little beauty, but too big and expensive for us. A Jew bought her and tore her up to sell for junk, and every time I think of the beautiful little *Water Witch*, all equipped and waiting so proudly for her new master, and then think of that greasy Jew going to take possession and tear her up, I feel like murdering him! I met a man to-day who was interested in my trading scheme, and he's going to give me a letter to a chap he thinks may take it up. The fellow's out of town now."

More time passed. The fall was over, and the winter cold beginning. During all of these months, Thérèse had studied Richard and had found him a never-failing source of interest. That he was clever she knew, for his instructions to her had gone steadily on. But why, when he was so unusually well-equipped mentally, had he failed to establish himself well long ago? In little things, he seemed always to have been successful, but in big things, he seemed always to have failed. Of course it was all wrong that he should ever have to face the things he did, but, having to face them, why had he not conquered them?

And yet, against her reason, he held her confidence. From his frank confession and from much that he said, he appeared to be heartless and unscrupulous, but in every act he showed con-

sideration for others and an almost strained sense of fair play. He would put himself out less for her than other lovers she had known, but he served all women with more devotion than the average man, and yet he professed to have no respect for them. He would talk for hours about his visionary hopes and plans, but he would never reveal the details of his daily efforts. He never gave excuses or explanations for anything. He called himself free and yet held himself bound by many ties. He was, in fact, Richard the paradox.

Once Thérèse ventured to ask:

"What is it in you, Richard, that sometimes makes you seem so far away, although I know you to be more comprehending than most people? When we talk of indifferent things—tastes and opinions—you are always near, as if there were no curtain between my brain and yours, but sometimes when I need you—need personal understanding—vitality, then you seem far away and I can't get at you at all."

"That," replied Richard thoughtfully, "is because I try to consider all things impersonally. It's all very well to study modern philosophies and to draw your own conclusions, but you can save yourself time and trouble if you'll read thoroughly a few of the classics and just accept the truths given there in the first place, for you're bound to come back to 'em anyway. You'll be as indifferent as I am in time. Know yourself, be true to yourself, and look at everything impersonally. Take the world in the abstract, and you'll get plenty of fun out of living and nothing can hurt you."

Thérèse's increasing knowledge of her companion was not gathered wholly from observation, or from listening to his conversation, for she had many talks with Betty and with others of his old friends and, without trying, she gleaned many bits of information which she pieced together in solving the puzzle

of Richard. Thus she learned that he had failed in one business venture by sticking too long to a losing proposition rather than leave other men in the lurch, and that he had resigned from a promising position rather than connive at the selling of stock that he knew would eventually prove valueless. She knew that he laughed at most men's scruples, but learned that he would rather die than go against any of his own. He could be brutally frank about things that he disliked, even to her, but she heard, again and again, of little kindnesses that he had put himself out to perform for people who were nothing to him.

One day Thérèse said, a little regretfully, while her eyes roamed around their sitting room:

"You and I didn't start out with any foolishly romantic ideas, but we've been rather forced into intimacy, haven't we? You know just how many clothes I have—and how I dress—and, I'm afraid, almost everything about me now. It's a shame, Richard, for we both have so much appreciation of other things. Do you suppose we could ever start fresh and flirt with each other all over again, if we could separate and come together under proper circumstances?"

"Don't be silly, Thérèse! Of course we could!" said Richard sharply.

But he was staring at the girl, who sat huddled in a slightly soiled and much mended negligee, and wondered how he had thought her piquant when she had first begun to wear that same garment.

"Of course it isn't her fault that she can't buy new and can't afford enough laundry, and she does manage well for a woman who's never had to do anything before," he declared loyally to himself, "but that doesn't change the way it looks to me."

Richard's laugh had dwindled until it was often little more than a somewhat pathetic smile. Occasionally he was ir-

ritable and frequently very silent, but he neither moped nor complained; he continued to smile, and he laughed whenever he could.

And then, one afternoon, as he was hurrying along Fifth Avenue, he found himself face to face with Helen Grant. He had known Helen for years, and it had been an understood thing, between their two families, that the two young people should marry. Richard had taken it for granted that he must succumb to the inevitable some time, and had admitted that Helen would be as suitable as any one, since she had a large fortune in her own right, and he had, during the five or six years of his more recent wanderings, kept up a correspondence that was binding neither to himself nor to the girl, but that had, nevertheless, kept her believing that he was always on the verge of saying something decisive. He had done this in the sincere belief that he was simply giving her her due and that, when he could no longer put off settling down, he would return to claim her. But then he had met Thérèse, and she had upset all his calculations. He rather wondered, now, just how he had happened to become so entangled, but decided that it must have been the effect of the tropics.

Helen was looking very fresh and smart and cared for, and she was on her way from the door of a select little shop to a big limousine, which panted by the curb. It was midwinter now, and Helen was swathed in priceless furs and had a big bunch of hothouse violets pinned to her muff. Helen, in fact, was a very fortunate young woman and looked it, and when she saw Richard, she put out a hand, exclaiming:

"Dick dear—dearest! I was just coming to look you up. You wouldn't come to see me, so I persuaded mama to let me come up to auntie's for a week, and she—Aunt Clara—said that I was to find you and bring you up to the

house to stay while I'm here. Won't that be heavenly? Oh, Dick darling, I'm so happy to see you again! I've waited such a long time, and now I've come to you, since you wouldn't come to me. Is that shocking? Say you're glad."

Richard thought very rapidly and, at the same time, reflected that it was a lucky thing that his overcoat was new and that it effectually covered up the suit underneath. Then he said:

"Dear little Helen, of course I'm glad to see you! How can you ask? But I'm sorry, too, because—well, it's the unluckiest thing on earth, but the fact is that I'm on my way now to keep an important business engagement, and I start immediately afterward for—*for Chicago.*"

"Dick! You can't go now!"

"Dear girl, I can't tell you how I hate to, but there's no way out of it. Everything depends on it."

"It's a good chance for you—to make money?"

Richard nodded his head.

"A whole lot?"

"I hope so."

"It's so perfectly absurd for you—you—when I have so much. But then we—"

"I hardly dare to hope, but—"

"Oh, Dick, couldn't you just come home with me for an hour? If we could only have one hour together!"

"I'm more than sorry, Helen, but I'll have to say no."

"I'm so terribly disappointed, boy dear, but—good luck go with you. And come to me as soon as you can?"

"Just as soon as I can."

She stepped into her car and drove away.

"I hate to lie," thought Richard while his eyes followed the big black limousine, "but if I have to, I might as well make it a good one. Jove, but it would seem great to stop in a real house again, with plenty of clothes and plenty of

servants and nothing to worry about! I've had some of my happiest days with Thérèse, but I've also had some of my hardest. It's too bad! I believe that, if things had turned out the way we planned, we could have gone on having glorious times for years, but they didn't and—I hate to admit it, even to myself, but I'm afraid there's not much mystery left."

That night he said to Thérèse:

"You know, dear, these business schemes are all very well, but I was always taught at home that there is only one way for a gentleman to make money and that is to marry it. I don't know but what they were right. I don't seem to be much of a success at anything else."

"You will be, dear. Don't grow discouraged," replied the girl. "Whom did you see to-day?"

"Nobody much."

But later on he said, with such elaborate carelessness that it would not have taken an astute observer to discern that the matter had been in his mind:

"I happened to meet a girl from home to-day. She came up to New York to shop and wants me to visit her, but I can't just now, because I haven't funds or clothes enough, so I let her think I was leaving town."

Thérèse asked a few questions with interest, and it was not long before she had drawn her own conclusions. For the rest of the evening she was very thoughtful.

"I suppose it'll come to that, Richard," she said at last. "You'll marry some nice girl with money."

The novel continued to pass from hand to hand, from one editor to another. Several of them admitted that the stuff was clever, but insisted, at the same time, that it wasn't quite what the public wanted. Its two authors were reduced now to the barest necessities. Richard walked long distances to avoid paying car fare and came home

looking exhausted. Thérèse ceased to go out, except in the evening, when they dined at some cheap table d'hôte. Occasionally they even omitted dining and got through the day on tea and toast. They borrowed from every one they could and sold, or pawned, the very last of their possessions. Still, they contrived somehow to keep their rooms and continued still to look fairly prosperous after they had dressed with care for the street. And on the rare occasions when a little money did come in, they still spent it so easily that no one would have suspected their straits.

One afternoon Thérèse went out to call on Betty. She found her at home in her cozy little studio, and the two women grew confidential over their tea.

"You've known Richard a long time, haven't you, Betty?" asked Thérèse at length.

"Oh, yes, a good many years," replied the younger girl. "He's been a dear, good friend to me. It was he who made it possible for me to study with Seitz and to get on with my music as I have. I shall never forget what he's done for me."

"He is kind to people sometimes, isn't he? You must know him very well—almost better than I. You've known him so much longer."

"Oh, but that's different. We were just good friends," asserted Betty with ready loyalty.

Thérèse smiled.

"You really are a dear, little Betty," she said. "Did you know his family and many of his friends also? You came from the same city where his father lives, didn't you?"

"Yes, but I only knew his people by sight. His mother died when I was quite a little girl. Of course I didn't travel in the same set," she went on with some embarrassment. "Richard was interested in me because he thought I'd make a success in music."

"I was just wondering if you knew

Helen Grant, one of his old friends. She's in town, and Richard met her the other day."

"Oh, that was the girl he used to be engaged—"

"Yes," interrupted Thérèse quietly and deliberately. "You know we're dreadfully hard up now?" She considered a while and then added, "Richard doesn't seem to worry much about it, though." She kept her eyes on Betty.

The girl was up in arms in an instant.

"Oh, Mrs. Mountgomery," she cried, "you don't know Richard! He does worry, only he doesn't talk about it. It's a shame! I'd like to kill those Colombian people! He worked so long and so hard, and then it all went to smash—all because of that beastly Robinson! You know Richard had—had—some differences with his people at home, and he went away in a huff, I believe, and then was too proud to go back or explain until he had made good. And he's been such a sport and never asked for help, or gone back, or said a word, and has worked hard all these years and laughed all the time, so that no one would think he was doing anything. And it seems as if the devil's own luck has pursued him, and everything has gone wrong. And it's all been so different from the way he ought to have it. It's a shame!"

Betty was almost crying, and Thérèse turned to her very tenderly.

"There, dear," she said, "don't you worry. Everything's coming out right for him, and I'm going to help—some way."

Thérèse had found out all that she wished to know, so she bade a hasty farewell and walked home slowly. Richard now looked very young and pathetic to her. She saw him an exile from the place where he belonged, denied the luxuries and the life that he had a right to expect, steeped in

traditions that made worldly success through his own efforts impossible, too proud to accept any real favors, in spite of his avowals to the contrary, and, through it all, such a gallant boy, making the best of everything. It was tragic, and Thérèse felt that there was nothing that she would not do to help him.

Richard was at home, when she reached there. She told him that she had been to Betty's and asked how his day had gone.

"Rotten," he replied. Then he looked up boyishly. "Thérèse," he said, "a funny thing happened this morning when I was on my way to see that man. I was walking past a large shop window when I happened to look up. They had a guard's uniform and a diplomat's—with decorations, you know—stuck up there on two dummies, and it just seemed as if I could see that officer standing there, with his monocle in his eye, mocking me. And I thought, 'What a silly ass you are, fussing over these petty things!' I couldn't talk business after that. I'm sorry, Thérèse."

"Richard," said Thérèse gently, "you're such a good sport. So much has gone wrong this winter, and you've never said a word."

"My father used to say, Thérèse, that if you whip a dog and he whines, he's a cur; if not, he's a thoroughbred. So I hope I don't whine. Also, I've learned by now that every time one loses a game, it's because the other fellow was a better player. Sometimes it takes a lot of knocks to teach one how to play, but one can learn—if one will."

"Richard," said Thérèse, putting her arms about him, "I love you."

"That's awfully nice of you, dear," replied Richard, as he kissed her a little absently and put her from him. "But hurry and get ready now. You know we're going out to MacDonald's, and we mustn't be late for dinner."

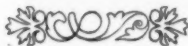
TO BE CONCLUDED.



A Hundred Little Doors

By Henry J. Buxton and Jessie E. Henderson

Authors of "Wanted: A Blemish," etc.



THEY collided. It was inevitable, for they were traveling toward each other almost on a straight line, and both were in a state of absent-mindedness. One was a plain little woman as thin as a furred umbrella. She carried a leather bag. Her manner bespoke timidity. The other was a big woman, six feet in height, who would have made the scales waver at two hundred pounds. Her crisp brown hair was mixed with white. Flinty eyes, a wide nose coldly freckled, and a large mouth that drooped sharply at the corners contributed to the aggressiveness of her appearance.

There can be no doubt of the outcome when two hundred pounds hurtles against one hundred and fifteen. The little woman fell to her knees; her black sailor hat went askew; the traveling bag flew from her fingers, flopped on its side five feet away, and opened.

"Can't you look where you are going?" demanded the big one.

The little woman was too bewildered from the shock of the impact to make reply, but in the process of collecting her wits, she noticed that the formidable person had a companion—a girl with a snubby nose and humorous blue eyes, all under a wide leghorn hat faced with black velvet, which accentuated the sheen of a mass of amber hair.

The older woman gave her unfriendly mouth a savage twist and sharp words seemed to be on her lips

when suddenly she paled. Her flinty eyes dilated with terror as she gazed fascinated at something on the sidewalk.

Curious at the remarkable change in the behavior of her enemy, the little woman looked about her and saw that the eyes of the large person were fixed upon the capsized traveling bag. Dozens of little white creatures were swarming from the mouth of the bag.

"Mice!" gasped the big woman. "Rats!" she added in a voice sibilant with horror.

With trembling fingers, she clutched the sides of her skirt, jerked the garment above her shoe tops, and started across the street, regardless of danger or dignity. A clanging trolley missed her by half a foot, and a chauffeur swore a deep oath as he swung his automobile aside. By a miracle she reached the opposite curb. To escape smiles, grins, and guffaws, she darted into a millinery store.

As for the little woman, she was on her knees beside the bag, scooping up agile little white things with tender hands. They were mice—tiny, pure-white, pink-eyed mice. The little woman's hands were so full of the soft, white little things that she was helpless to interfere when one of them slipped away from her and scurried investigatively toward a grating. She had given up the little adventurer for lost when there was a rush of flying skirts, and a

young woman bent over the grating. A small hand flashed out and caught the mouse as it nosed at the brink of the opening. The rescuer rose and turned, and the little woman recognized her as the companion of the amazonian person who had fled so precipitately across the street.

"Isn't it cunning?" said the girl, smoothing the soft fur with the tip of her middle finger. "I had no idea they were so sweet. Such darling little ruby eyes! Really, there's no reason in the world why anybody should be in the least afraid of them."

The little woman smiled grimly.

"No," she answered curtly, "there's no reason why anybody should be afraid, but I've noticed that everybody doesn't feel the way we do about it."

"Do you know, that was the first time I ever saw auntie really frightened? She's usually so brave and forceful."

"I can very well believe that," the little woman replied with a tightening of her thin lips. She placed the last of the truant mice in the bag and closed it. Her face still reflected resentment as she rose to her feet and adjusted her hat.

This was sensed by the girl, for her face sobered.

"Don't hold a grudge against auntie," she pleaded. "She has a temper like a guinea hen, and she's accustomed to having things her own way."

"Even on the sidewalk," suggested the little woman, a smile beginning at the corners of her prim mouth.

"Yes, and everywhere else," conceded the girl with a sigh that bespoke a patience sorely tried.

The little woman felt her resentment melting away like a snowflake before an April sunbeam. It dawned upon her that she liked this girl.

"Let's forget it," she suggested.

"Yes, let's," acquiesced the girl.

The smile that had been lingering at

the corners of the little woman's mouth widened until it illumined and transformed what had at first appeared a rather threadbare personality. The girl had thought her unattractive until that smile. It seemed to soften the harsh lines in the deeply tanned face.

It was, perhaps, the radiance of the smile that caused the girl to say impulsively:

"What are you going to do with those cunning little mice? I'm just dying with curiosity."

"The mice are breeders. I bought them for my rat farm." She added in further explanation: "My name is Abbie Northrup, and I live in Enfield, Maryland."

"A rat farm!" exclaimed the girl with a widening of her blue eyes. "Why, what in the world do you mean?"

"Just what I say!" returned Miss Northrup a bit stiffly. Then, with just a shade of defiance: "I raise rats and mice—that's how I make my living. I sell them to hospital and medical-college laboratories for experimental purposes."

"Oh!" breathed the girl in wonderment. "How odd—how unusual!" She laughed in silvery cadences that made Miss Northrup think of a brook purling over pebbles. "Think of a woman raising rats! One can imagine a man doing it, but a woman—never!"

"It is a bit odd," admitted Miss Northrup.

"Have you many rats on your farm?"

"More than fifteen thousand," came the proud reply.

"Fifteen thousand!" repeated the girl in astonishment. "My, what a lot of rats!"

"You'd think so if you had to feed them three times a day. They keep me on the hustle from morning until night."

"Enfield—Enfield," said the girl

ruminatively. "Oh, yes, I remember! Enfield is a sort of Gretna Green for eloping couples."

Miss Northrup sniffed a sniff that was eloquent of her opinion of Enfield as a Gretna Green.

"Yes, they come to town in droves to get married, but I've given up worrying about it, for there seems to be no way of stopping the young fools."

"But think of the humor of it—all of those hundreds and hundreds of prospective brides scurrying away every year to a town where reside fifteen thousand rats! Heavens, but wouldn't a lot of them shiver if they knew?"

"Well," rejoined Miss Northrup with emphasis, "if I thought it'd keep them out of Enfield, I'd put up signs at the depot and on all the highways. But girls who are brazen enough to run off and get married wouldn't have any fear of rats."

"Fear of rats wouldn't keep me from Enfield, especially since I've seen yours. They're very cunning. I'd love to visit your farm."

Miss Northrup smiled with gratification. She was about to reply when there came an interruption:

"Anet-a! Anet-a! Come here!"

It was auntie. She had recrossed the street and stood at a distance from Miss Northrup and the girl. She showed no disposition to come nearer and kept a wary eye on Miss Northrup's bag.

"Auntie," coaxed the girl, "do come here. I want you to meet Miss Northrup."

"No!" boomed the big woman rudely. "We are late now for the matinée. Come at once, Anet-a!" This in the tone of a mother to a naughty three-year-old.

The girl flushed, and her eyes filmed with tears. She grasped Miss Northrup's hand.

"I do hope we shall meet again," she said hurriedly. Then she was gone.

Memory of this encounter and of the girl's agitation was still fresh in the mind of Miss Northrup when she arose at six o'clock the next morning. A radiant sun was already at work glorifying the world, and the scent of honeysuckle permeated the air. Quickly she was outside in her work clothes, which consisted of a plaid waist, blue bloomers pulled below the knees, black cotton stockings, and tan sandals. She wore no hat. Her brown hair was pulled tightly back into a severe little knot.

Just then the most unprejudiced would unhesitatingly have classified this flat-chested, sharp-elbowed, and thin-shanked little woman as an old maid beyond any possible redemption. Yet nature had not been wholly unkind to her, for she had expressive eyes. Though too round to be beautiful, they were brown and soft and suggestive of calm and patience.

There are few women who cannot look back over the span of years and remember with a throb of tenderness some gentle affair of the heart, but Abbie Northrup was not one of these. Never in her life had she shed a tear over any man, with the exception of her father; there was no age-stained photograph of a long-ago sweetheart tucked away in her bureau drawer. Passing angulately through her school days without even the most embryonic girl-and-boy affair, she had entered an absolutely swainless young womanhood. Indeed, she had made the uneventful voyage to the barren isle of spinsterhood without a solitary man having rocked the boat. She was now forty-five years old, and every day of her age had a shameless habit of responding "present" to the roll call of casual estimate.

If Miss Northrup had inherited any of the woman's traditional fear of the mouse, it had been quickly squelched by necessity. After the death of her

father, she had had to make a living. Reading that there was money in raising rats, she had experimented. The business had grown until now her markets included some of the leading medical laboratories in the country.

The villagers poked considerable fun at her and her enterprise, but at the same time they stood in awe of her success. She was admittedly the most prosperous person in town. She owned a runabout and a player-piano, and every summer she spent the first two weeks of August at Atlantic City.

The rats were quartered in a barn in the rear of the house. A number of extra windows had been cut into all sides of the building so as to permit of plenty of sunlight.

When Miss Northrup entered the rattery, there was a squeaking and a scurrying in the dozens of cages that lined the walls. Little pink noses poked out investigatively, and ratty pink tails stood upright questioningly. The inhabitants of the cages appeared to know that breakfast hour had arrived.

A maltese cat of remarkable size hopped down from the top of a barrel and, with curving tail and a pur like the drone of a distant aeroplane, rubbed affectionately against Miss Northrup's ankles. She bent over and stroked the sleek fur.

"Doughboy," she asked, "have you guarded missy's rats faithfully all night?"

In the language of purs and rubs and tail loopings, Doughboy indicated that he had done his duty to the best of his catty ability.

Miss Northrup filled a bucket with grain from a bin and moved along the tiers of cages, sprinkling each with corn. She smiled as she paused before a cage where a new litter had been born during the night. Snapping open the little wooden door, she gently scooped up the tiny things and examined them with the eye of an expert. The inspec-

tion seemed to please her, for she smiled again as she placed them back.

The work of feeding was nearly finished when suddenly Miss Northrup uttered a cry of anger. She dropped the little metal grain scoop into the bucket and jerked open the door of a cage. Reaching in a bony hand, she grasped a large white rat by the nape of the neck.

"Cannibal!" she hissed, shaking the rodent until it squeaked piteously. She tossed it back into the cage and closed the door.

"Unnatural mother, to eat such a nice family of children!"

The incident upset her, because she knew that parent rats seldom acquire the cannibalistic habit unless there is a fault in their diet. The study of rat diet had been a special one with her and she could see no reason why that particular mother rat should backslide from the ethics of respectable and properly fed ratdom.

The feeding finished, she wandered into the garden, with Doughboy frisking at her heels. She inspected her cucumber vines and tomato plants, and paused entranced before a bush on which bloomed a blood-red Jack rose. The flower sparkled with crystals of morning dew, and Miss Northrup buried her nose in the heart of the bloom and in ecstasy filled her lungs with its perfume.

A low rumble sounded off in the distance and she looked up from her flower worship and searched the southern horizon with the appraising eye of a weather-wise country woman.

"A storm off there somewhere," she thought. "Well, we need it badly, anyhow."

Mothering a flower bed here and a bit of shrubbery or a fruit tree there, she turned the corner of the house just as Bill Hodges, the rural-free-delivery carrier, drove up to the gate with his sorrel horse. He was in the act of

slipping some mail into the box on the gate post when he espied Miss Northrup.

"Mornin'," he croaked cordially. "Lot of mail for you. Do you know, Abbie, you're Uncle Sam's best customer in Enfield?"

"That so?" smiled Miss Northrup, pleased at the tribute.

"Yep," said Hodges with a congratulatory grin which exposed an upper jaw minus three front teeth. "For some weeks your mail has been runnin' bigger than Converse's, the dry-goods storekeeper. You must be doin' a powerful lot of business."

"Well, I've worked for it," offered Miss Northrup with some asperity. "I haven't just sat down and twiddled my thumbs for the past four or five years, like some folks I know."

"You're a hard worker," conceded Hodges. "Every fair-minded person in Enfield has got to give you credit for that. Heard the latest, Abbie?"

"No," replied Miss Northrup, her curiosity immediately fired by the prospect of a bit of news.

"The Reverend James Pickins, of the First Church, is circulatin' a petition of protest against Enfield bein' used by young folks for a hundred miles round about as an elopin' center. He figures that the town has been disgraced long enough, and he wants to put a stop to it. He calculates to git the petition before the next session of the legislature, and he's talkin' about a bill to reform the marriage laws of the State."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Miss Northrup. "I'm glad somebody in Enfield has got up a little spunk. Why, it was only yesterday a girl in Philadelphia asked me if Enfield wasn't the place where young folks head when they want to get married without the say-so of their parents. I'll sign that petition if it comes around to me."

Hodges ran a gnarled hand through his scrubby gray beard.

"I can't say I just agrees with you, Abbie. Young folks will git married, you know, an' if they can't git tied in one place, they'll go to another. I suspect there's a little spite back of that 'ere petition."

"Spite?" queried Miss Northrup.

"Well," cautiously, "I wouldn't want this to go any further, but the truth is that all the ministers is sore on the Reverend John Marple."

"The marryin' parson!" snorted Miss Northrup. "They ought to be sore on him! Any pastor who has got so unhitched to his self-respect as to come into a town for the sole purpose of making profit out of silly elopers isn't entitled to much consideration, in my opinion!"

"But the other ministers," interposed Hodges, "were right on the job when the pickin's was good. You know yourself, Abbie, they're peeved to death 'cause Marple got a corner on the marriage-fee business."

"Yes," sarcastically, "and how did he get the corner? By giving cab and automobile drivers a dollar a head for every couple they brought to him."

"That's how he did the trick," conceded Hodges, "but everything's fair in love an' war, you know."

"I wouldn't know the Reverend Marple if I saw him, but I haven't much opinion of a minister with such low principles!" denounced Miss Northrup. "I hope they drive him out of town!"

"I ain't much up on religion," Hodges replied as he gathered up the reins, "but business is business, and Marple sure is a right enterprisin' feller. Why, I hear he cleaned up more'n ninety dollars last week in marriage fees, an' the other ministers is furious."

Miss Northrup went into the house to look over her mail. Five of the letters released sizable checks, and six envelopes inclosed orders for rats. She glowed with satisfaction.

She was too intent upon her mail to

notice that the sun had disappeared behind low-hanging dark clouds rolling up from the south. A flash of lightning and a peal of thunder sent her scurrying to the rat barn, where she made fast the windows. As she returned to the house under rapidly darkening skies, huge drops pelted downward, and lightning zigzagged vividly on black cloud backgrounds. It was one of those peppery thunderstorms which crash intermittently over northern Maryland, flattening corn rows, ripping limbs from fruit trees, and hurtling incandescent bolts.

Gazing up the road, which a half hour before had been brown with powdery dust, but was now almost a mill-race, Miss Northrup saw an automobile hub deep in water and mire. The machine was making poor progress toward the house. It had no top, and its two occupants were receiving the full benefit of the downpour.

"Poor creatures," murmured Miss Northrup, "they must be soaked to the skin!"

The automobile swung into her driveway and stopped at the porch, and her heart warming with sympathy for the unfortunates, she threw open the door, to behold two of the wettest human beings she had ever seen.

One was a girl—a very damp girl with a wide hat, much wilted. The other was a young man—a good-looking boy, with confident, straight-gazing gray eyes, cheeks glowing with health, and a firm, clean-cut chin. Raindrops fell intermittently from his cap vizor and splashed his freckled nose.

He flashed Miss Northrup a captivating smile as he snapped a raindrop from his nose.

"May we stick here on your porch for a while until the flood is over?" he queried. "You see, we neglected to bring our life preservers."

But Miss Northrup did not reply. She was engaged in studying the girl

with dawning recognition. The girl, too, was looking at her with a growing expression of astonishment.

"Oh!" she said in wonderment. "Y-you are Miss Northrup!"

With surprise on his damp face, the boy looked from one to the other.

"You folks seem acquainted," he grinned boyishly. "Let me in on this, Aneta."

"Jack," cried the girl, "isn't this too wonderful for anything? This is Miss Abbie Northrup—the lady I told you about last night who raises rats for a living. Miss Northrup, Mr. John Carlton."

The young man grasped Miss Northrup's hand and shook it enthusiastically.

"Overjoyed," he beamed, "to meet the only woman I ever heard of with the nerve to raise rats."

Miss Northrup laughed, in spite of her inherent distrust of men, and led the way into the kitchen.

"You must stay here until the storm is over," she urged.

"Looks as if we'd have to," answered the boy.

"Are you in a hurry?" asked Miss Northrup.

"Oh, no! We're in no hurry!" Carlton replied, flashing a humorous glance at Aneta. He added, addressing Miss Northrup, "Possibly you've seen a picture of a missionary bounding over the desert sands two laps ahead of the lion. Well, we're in no more hurry than that."

"Jack!" reproved the girl with a warning look.

Miss Northrup was puzzled over the young man's words and felt her curiosity stirring.

"You take off your hat and coat and come upstairs and get some dry things," she said to Aneta.

"I'm not very wet," countered the girl.

"Yes, you are," insisted Miss North-

rap, "and if you keep those wet clothes on, you're liable to catch your death."

Aneta removed her hat, and the boy helped her out of her coat. Then she followed the little spinster upstairs. From a closet in her bedroom, Miss Northrup brought forth a crisp bungalow apron and a pair of stockings and slippers.

"These things won't be a fit, I know," she said, "but they'll be dry, anyway." "I'm lucky to get them," answered the girl gratefully.

She removed her damp dress, and Miss Northrup laid it over the back of a chair to dry.

"Did your aunt get over her scare?" she inquired, smiling at the recollection.

"Wasn't it too funny for anything?" laughed Aneta. "She was unnerved all afternoon and evening, and, my, wasn't she cross?"

"Isn't that—er—habitual with her?" asked Miss Northrup, a trifle maliciously.

"No, indeed!" defended Aneta. "Auntie has a heart as big as a melon, but she has a frightful temper and loves to have her own way. I've always given in until recently. I just won't now!" She tossed her head defiantly.

Miss Northrup burned to ask questions, but would rather have bitten off her tongue than have done so.

When they reached the kitchen, they found the boy on his knees, playing with two kittens he had found snuggled up near the wood box. He was drawing a piece of string over the floor and snickering when the kittens, with odd little side leaps, lashing tails, and dancing eyes, tried to put their tiny paws on the wriggling thing. His enjoyment was so genuine that both Aneta and Miss Northrup felt its contagion and burst into laughter.

"Get up from that floor before you wear holes through the knees of your trousers," enjoined Aneta.

Ignoring the command, Carlton

grasped the kittens by the napes of the necks and rubbed their cool, damp noses together. Then he dropped them, banged his palms on the floor, and cried: "Scat, you little imps!" The kittens scuttled under the stove as if the very Old Nick of catdom was at their heels, but presently their little noses poked out investigatively.

As the young man rose to his feet, brushing his trouser legs, Aneta grasped the sides of the bungalow apron and made a curtsy.

"Mr. Man," she smiled coyly, "doesn't Aneta look like a little housewife?"

"You can bet!" exclaimed Jack. He swept the girl into his arms and kissed her with such fervor that Miss Northrup felt she was going to faint with embarrassment.

"Don't!" protested Aneta, her voice muffled by the close embrace. "What will Miss Northrup think?"

"We're engaged," asserted Carlton stoutly, "and when a fellow's engaged to a girl, he's a perfect right to kiss her, hasn't he, Miss Northrup?"

"R-really," stammered Miss Northrup, "r-really I—I don't know. You see—I've never been engaged."

"Never been engaged!" burst out the boy. "Well, what—"

Just then sounded a bang and a scuffle, as if some one had landed on the porch in a hurry, and Miss Northrup, glad of an opportunity to escape, fled to the front door.

She looked through the door glass and saw a very wet man of medium height, with his coat collar turned up. He was shaking water from a much-wilted straw hat. When Miss Northrup opened the door, she observed that he had a round, jolly face with brown eyes sparkling with humor.

"In another minute I would have drowned," he explained with a wet smile that exposed much gold. "Do

you mind if I borrow your porch until the storm slows up?"

"Won't you come into the house?"

"No, indeed, I'm quite contented out here, and besides"—humorously he looked down at the rivulets that were running from the ends of his trouser legs—"it's impossible, you see. I'd flood you out of house and home."

Flustered by so much excitement all in one day, Miss Northrup closed the door. As she returned to the kitchen, she heard Aneta inquire anxiously:

"Are we doing right, Jack? I'm afraid that auntie—" Miss Northrup could not hear the rest of the sentence, but she heard Carlton reply:

"Right? Of course we're right, and the time'll come when auntie will think so too. You know, girlie—"

There came a frightful interruption—a vivid, soul-searing flash, followed by a deafening detonation that seemed to announce the end of the world. Miss Northrup paused terrified at the entrance of the kitchen, a queer tingling racing over her body. The girl, with a scream, ran to the boy and cowered in his arms. Carlton's face had paled and his eyes were startled.

"It hit the house!" he exclaimed.

"No," said Miss Northrup unsteadily. "It struck out back somewhere—maybe my rat barn."

All concern, she hurried to a window and looked out. The rain had slackened a little, and a light rift showed in the lowering clouds. Evidently the bolt had been the last vicious kick of the rapidly departing storm. She could not see that anything had happened to the rattery, but, by no means assured, she threw the cape of a mackintosh over her head and hurried out. When she swung open the door of the barn, she found the boy and girl at her heels. They stepped inside, and she closed the door.

A sigh of deep relief escaped her when she saw that there was nothing

amiss. The mice seemed disturbed, however, for they scurried about squeaking in their cages.

"It didn't strike here," she said, moving toward a window. Aneta and Jack followed.

"My poor northern spyl!" cried Miss Northrup in a grief-stricken voice. "See, there's where it struck!" She pointed to an apple tree riven through the trunk. The tree was split in a letter V, and the branches, laden with moist, half-matured fruit, were bowed in the wet grass.

"Whew! A three-inch shell couldn't have done the job cleaner!" observed Jack in an awe-struck voice. "There must have been a Hun astride that storm."

Aneta and Jack turned and took note of their surroundings.

"Smokes!" exclaimed the boy. "Never saw so many rats in my life."

He rubbed his finger against the nose of a big rodent with amethyst eyes. Apparently not used to such familiarity, the animal whisked to the rear of the cage.

"Huh!" grunted Carlton. "First rat I ever saw with blue eyes."

"I have them with yellow eyes, green eyes, and pink eyes," volunteered the spinster proudly. She opened a cage and drew out a large, wriggling rat.

"Why, it's blue!" cried Aneta, amazed.

"Almost as blue as the sky," announced Miss Northrup. "See—it has eyes to match. It's wonderful what can be done by cross-breeding."

As she tucked the rat back into the cage, Doughboy padded noiselessly down the stairs leading from the loft of the barn. The big cat gazed questioningly at the visitors, and then, as if terribly bored, stretched out first one hind leg, then another, and yawned a feline yawn, exposing a tooth-fringed cavity which looked for all the world

like a little red cavern ornamented with stalactites.

"A cat in a rat colony! Gosh, that's a new one on me! What's the idea, placing all this temptation in front of one poor mouser?"

"Nothing could tempt Doughboy to eat one of my rats," defended Miss Northrup. "I'll prove it to you."

Swiftly opening a cage, she reached in, grasped a small white rat, and placed it on the floor. The rat made off, but before it had progressed ten feet, Doughboy dropped on it with a bound. Seizing it by the nape of the neck, much as a mother cat takes hold of a kitten, he brought the rodent unharmed to his mistress.

"Good Doughboy!" praised Miss Northrup, bending over to take the captive and at the same time stroking the cat.

"Say, what'll you take for that safety-first mouser?" exclaimed Jack admiringly.

"Wouldn't sell him for a million. What do you want him for?"

"What do I want him for?" grinned Carlton. "Why, to go on the stage of course. With Doughboy, I could make two hundred dollars a week in vaudeville."

"Doughboy on the stage!" said Miss Northrup, horrified. "He's a respectable cat, I wish you to understand, and he wouldn't leave his missy for the world, would you, Doughboy?" She rubbed Doughboy's sleek back, and the cat purred its agreement with her sentiments.

The door opened, and in walked the jolly-faced man who had taken refuge on Miss Northrup's porch at the height of the storm. Closing the door, he stood with his back to it.

"Pardon the intrusion," he said. "I heard the crash and figured it must have struck either the house or the barn. There seemed to be no one in the house, so I came——"

He did not finish, for suddenly the door banged against his back with great force, and he fell forward on his hands and knees.

A very wet, very cross, and very big woman towered in the doorway. Casting a contemptuous glance at the man she had bowled over, who was now ruefully regaining his feet, she swept the rest of the group with a look of fury.

A chill swept down the spine of Miss Northrup. She had no difficulty in recognizing this woman of flinty eyes.

"A-u-n-tie!" gasped Aneta, the color leaving her cheeks.

Jack showed evidences of shock.

"An-eta Morgan!" boomed the big woman. "*Come here!*" Her flinty eyes flashed fire as, with commanding forefinger, she indicated the exact spot beside her on the floor where she wanted the girl to come.

Jack's jaw closed with a click, and his eyes narrowed.

"You'll do nothing of the kind, Aneta," he said, and he threw an arm protectingly about the girl.

The flinty eyes and the mouth that slid downhill at the corners now turned on Carlton.

"You sneak!" hissed auntie. "I'll see that you never marry her!"

"Yes, I will!" retorted Carlton with the assurance and determination of youth.

"I will marry him," asserted Aneta, very white, but with stubborn little lines about her mouth.

"You're coming home with me before you do something you'll be sorry for to the very last day of your life!"

The grim one stepped forward, but stopped suddenly, her flinty eyes roving the cages of rats. She paled, but regained her assurance when she saw that the cages were fastened. But the rats stirred recollections, for she turned upon Miss Northrup accusingly.

"Oh, yes! I remember you! Don't

you think you should be in better business than aiding a couple of young fools to elope?"

"Elope?" repeated Miss Northrup.

"Yes, elope! E-lope!" emphasized auntie, the corners of her mouth going down until they threatened to slide over the edge of her chin. "Possibly you don't know the meaning of the word?" she added sarcastically.

"This is the first time I've heard of any elopement," protested the spinster. "These two young people came to my house to get out of the rain. I didn't know they had run off to get married."

"Well, that's just what they've done, but I was too smart for them! I got on their trail in the limousine, and when I get that silly girl back home, I'll fix it so she'll never see this young snipe again!"

"Auntie, won't you please listen to reason?" Aneta spoke pleadingly, but there was no lessening of the determination in her face.

She of the grim mouth did not reply, but took a menacing stride forward. Carlton placed the girl behind him and stood with elevated chin and hands thrust into his pockets. It was plain he was prepared to meet force with force. The tensiety of the situation impressed all present excepting the jolly-faced stranger, who looked on with a half smile.

Miss Northrup, her gentle soul athrob with strange and conflicting emotions, gazed fascinated first at auntie, and then at the lovers. Like a woman seeing her first melodrama, she was visualizing auntie as a fearful and forceful villain and Aneta and Jack as a much persecuted hero and heroine. Also, she was beginning to glimpse the psychology of elopements, and for the first time in forty-five years romance surged in on her soul like a tide through a broken dike. Swept away by her emotions, she concentrated her gaze upon the big woman.

"You," she gasped, her face a bright pink, "you—you——"

Darting to a row of cages, she began opening little doors. As fast as she opened them, dozens of white rats and mice, overjoyed at their liberty, swarmed out and scurried over the floor. A laugh broke from Aneta, Carlton beamed, and the half smile on the face of the stranger widened to a delighted grin.

For a second the big woman stood as if petrified, but she came suddenly to life when a rat frisked over her shoe. Screeching, she lifted her skirts and looked about wildly.

"The idea's perfect!" cried Jack. "Aneta, let's help!"

They ran to another row of cages and snapped open little doors as fast as their hands could move. More rats—scores of them—joined their comrades on the floor. A platoon of them ran squeaking toward auntie, who stood frozen with fright. That was more than she could bear. Her eyes, no longer flinty, but terror-stricken, searched for an avenue of escape. A grain bin against the south wall of the barn seemed a rock of refuge. Uttering little frenzied cries, she flew to the bin, and, with astonishing agility for such a large person, scrambled to the top. There she stood upright, a shaking picture of fear.

Miss Northrup and her two assistants had now opened more than a hundred little doors, and they paused to survey their work. The floor swarmed with two thousand rats and mice. Smelling the grain, a hungry thousand assembled around the bin, nosing at the cracks and attempting to climb up the sides. Auntie was marooned on an island in a squeaking ocean.

"Take them away!" she shrieked, peering over the sides in abject terror.

Doubled up with laughter, the jolly-faced man now appeared very jolly indeed.

"Ho—ha—he!" he wheezed. "This is the funniest elopement I ever saw!"

Miss Northrup felt a grim satisfaction which was as balm to her soul, but the strategical importance of the situation was uppermost in her mind.

"You have no time to lose," she admonished Carlton, and pointed to the door.

"Don't you dare, Aneta Morgan!" cried auntie, forgetting her fear for a second.

She moved as if to leap from the bin, but cowered back with a squeal when she saw a pink nose and little ruby eyes peeping over the edge of the box. One of the rats, in its eagerness for grain, had managed to climb to the top, but it lost its hold and fell back scratching to the floor.

"Come on, Aneta," grinned Carlton, moving toward the door.

"If you really want to get married, I can do the job," laughed the jolly-faced man, wiping tears from his eyes.

"You!" exclaimed Miss Northrup.

"I'm the Reverend John Marple," informed the stranger, his brown eyes dancing with fun.

"*The marrying parson!*" gasped Miss Northrup.

"The same," he returned modestly.

"You're a real, honest-to-goodness minister and can hitch us good and tight, and quickly?" queried Carlton eagerly.

"In two minutes by the watch, if you have your license."

"Here it is," said Carlton, whipping out a document.

"Correct," announced the Reverend Marple briskly after a quick inspection. "All ready."

Auntie looked on in helpless rage as Aneta and Jack took positions in front of the minister. Miss Northrup, with Doughboy purring against her ankles, stood beside them. The big woman put a foot cautiously over the edge of the bin, but a look at the swarming rats

quickly quelled her spirit of adventure.

"I'll have you prosecuted!" screamed auntie.

The Reverend Marple paid no heed, but leaped into the ceremony with the speed of a Bleriot whizzing to the attack over the lines of the enemy. In fact, the motion was so swift that Aneta leaned dizzily against Jack when, in less than two minutes, the words "man and wife" came to her singing ears.

Giving his watch a fleeting glance, the minister announced with a grin:

"One minute and thirty-four seconds. Fast, eh?"

The words "man and wife" had prodded auntie like a shock of electricity.

"Oh!" she shrieked. "Oh! If I ——" Words failed her, and she brought her hands together with a bang, her eyes darting venom.

"We're married now," said the boy, eying her defiantly. "What are you going to do about it?"

The big woman glared at him, dumb with the fury that shook her.

"Auntie," coaxed Aneta, "I'd like to have you be friends with me and my husband."

"Friends!" snorted the woman of grim visage. "Why, I——"

She stopped under the compulsion of a compelling glance which Miss Northrup had fastened upon her.

"Come on, folks, let's go into the house," said Miss Northrup.

Auntie's face grew paler. Wildly she looked over the side of the bin, where hundreds of rats still scrambled and squeaked with looping tails. Five zealous rodents were making a heroic effort to shinny to the top of the grain box. Her lip quivered, and suddenly her flinty eyes filled with tears. In a panic she called:

"Are you leaving me?"

"Yes," retorted Miss Northrup, "you

can stay here all night if necessary. When you get ready to agree to an armistice, just holler, and we'll come out and talk it over."

"Don't go!" wailed the woman.

Suddenly she dropped to her knees on the bin and sobbed hysterically, covering her face with her hands. Astonished, the others paused in the doorway.

"An armistice?" queried Miss Northrup.

"Y-y-e-s," came the sobbing reply.

Aneta flew back and wound her arms about her aunt's neck. There they rocked and sobbed together, Aneta en-

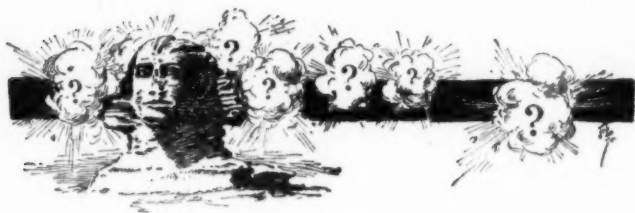
tirely oblivious of the rats that scampered about her feet.

The marrying parson chuckled and inspected his wilted straw hat. Carlton placed his hands on Miss Northrup's shoulders and looked admiringly into her brown eyes.

"You're the best little trump I know!" he blurted. He bent and kissed her resoundingly on both cheeks.

They were her first man kisses, except for those given long ago by her father, and she reddened like a poppy.

"Mercy! My rats!" she exclaimed, and began scooping them up by the armful.



WITHOUT BEGINNING

BUT one year old, thou sayst, this love of ours?

Nay, hast thou then forgot the lazy Nile

Whereon we drifted in a barge—the while

Rome called to thee in vain—the lotus flowers

That dreamed with us through many golden hours?

And thou didst swear the brightness of my smile

Made great Osiris pale, whilst to beguile

Away thy cares I strove with all my powers!

Nay, even in a past that seems more dim,

Did I not place, at dusk, upon the wall

A lighted torch? And thou didst nightly swim

The Hellespont. There at thy loving call

I came to thee, and by the water's rim

Forgot the world, Venus, my vows, and all!

HELBA BAKER.



"Happiness, Ltd."

By F. E. Baily

Author of "Her Feet Beneath Her Petticoat,"

"Yesterday's Roses," etc.

VI.—If I Give You the Keys of Heaven

A SUNBEAM of late spring, shining through the casement window of her pink-and-gray consulting room in Bond Street, gilded the hair of Helen Vereker, which shone finer than silk spun for queens' palaces. Her tall, slender prettiness, draped with such perfection in a little black frock, lacerated the susceptible heart of Mr. Frankie Sheringham, an old friend invalided from the army, who sat drinking tea and the forlorn beauty of brown eyes with golden spots. Helen turned to him and smiled, raising one eyebrow a shade higher than the other.

"Every one is good," she murmured, "but only I know it. You're an old Goth, Frankie. You belong to the stone age. You ought to have a club with spikes on it and live on raw meat. You don't believe a word of what I say."

His eye wandered to a framed advertisement from the Agony Column of the *Morning Post*, which stood on her desk:

Every one ought to be happy. If you are not happy, consult Happiness, Ltd., 2000 Bond Street. W. Hours 2-5 p. m. Tel. 2527, West.

Frankie sighed a little. His glance wandered over her with that blank, undisguised affection which is the birth-right of some women and which others starve for all their lives. It was not

lost on Helen. A faint hint of distress crept into her eyes, and she looked away.

"I know you're quite mad, but it's such a nice mad I wouldn't alter you for worlds," he said gently. "Helen dear——"

There interrupted him the sound of a voice singing. It came from a woman on the floor beneath, given to the practice of music. She sang not unattractively, and the words were easily distinguishable:

"If I give you the keys of heaven,
If I give you the keys of heaven,
Madam, will you walk,
Madam, will you talk,
Madam, will you walk and talk with me?"

"I haven't the keys, but I'll try to find them, he murmured, looking straight into the brown eyes. "Will you, Helen, dear lady?"

She shook her distressed head ever so faintly, and as if the malign gods made sport of him, there came from below the remainder of the verse:

"Though you give me the keys of heaven,
Though you give me the keys of heaven,
Yet I will not walk,
Yet I will not talk,
Yet I will not walk and talk with you."

She put out a slender hand, and he took it in both his.

"I'm so sorry, Frankie. We're such pals, and I'm frightfully happy. I'm frightened of these dreadful, irrevoc-

cable steps in the dark. Don't spoil things, there's a dear. We're so happy friendly as we are."

He smiled at her very much like a lover and a little like God.

"You must have everything just as you would like it, little friend. I had to tell you. Sorry."

He rose a trifle wearily and picked up hat and stick.

"I'll be as good as gold to-morrow. You don't mind if I run away now, do you, just to be quiet and think a little, same as all nice people have to now and then? Good night, Helen."

A little shiver ran over her for a second. She raised her chin the psychological half inch and looked at him consideringly.

"I'm glad you asked me. It's the biggest compliment a girl can have from a nice man. And please, please, don't be hurt, Frankie!"

He almost laughed. Sometimes women are so extraordinarily illogical.

"Thank you for being glad," was all he said.

He went back sadly to his rooms in Savoy Street. When a man has cultivated a fruitful friendship in the hope that one day it may be transfigured into something even more perfect, hope dies very bitterly. In his quiet, gray-toned sitting room, he smoked pipe after pipe, reviewing the situation.

"I'll try," he said at last. "I'll try the old, old stunt of absence and another girl. Helen's far too clever, but even a clever woman's a woman. I think Bertie Savernare of the *Georgette* will do. She isn't contracted to any one, she's very pretty, and I can do her a bit of good in return. I'll plant her face on my editors and feed her at significant places."

So that very night he besought Bertie at the stage door, and they supped. He detailed his campaign, naming no names, while she sipped a sticky liqueur, shrugged her white

shoulders, and messed daintily with a barbaric ring. She had real auburn hair, gray eyes, and the dazlingly fair complexion of her coloring.

"All right, Frankie," she agreed at last. "But I want a full page in the *Prattler*, and ever so many suppers and things, and you're to take me to the Golden Revel at the Savoy when it happens. Remember, I'm saving your life, even if it does break my own heart."

II.

"It is extraordinary that he visits us so little, this Monsieur Chereahngon," observed Miquette sadly, a fortnight later. Miquette was the beautiful French flapper who, in Helen's consulting rooms, served fortunate clients with tea. She wore the kind of black pinafore peculiar to French schoolgirls, and she had delightful black silk legs.

"Mr. Sheringham is probably busy, and, besides, there's no reason why he should come here," replied Helen with faint pettishness.

"But he is so fine, and he came so often, and the other day I have seen him with a pretty red-haired one in Bond Street," complained Miquette. "She dresses herself at good shops, *ma foi!*"

"Some one's ringing. Go and see who it is," commanded Miquette's employer.

In the wake of Miquette, there entered a baby gunner. He had the rather long, thin face that goes with hair plastered back, and he also dressed himself at good shops, being clad in the sort of clothes one sees only on other people. He seemed to be a certain Lieutenant Creagh. Helen waved him graciously into a chair.

"You would like tea and a cigarette, wouldn't you? Miquette!"

The baby gunner, whose years numbered possibly twenty-two, sank gratefully into the embrace of the padded

wicker. His eyes wandered over Helen with the undisconcerting stare of self-confident youth.

"I saw your advertisement," he began. "Rather sporting of you, what?"

"Not at all," replied Helen, smiling most sweetly for his undoing. "Every one is good, though only I know it, and so every one ought to be happy. What makes you unhappy, Mr. Creagh? You look wonderfully contented."

"My heart is broken," explained Mr. Creagh sepulchrally. "I'm at home on special duty for some months. Five nights ago, I went to the Georgette Theater and there I saw a girl who is the absolute last word of everything. Saving your presence, she's the most beautiful thing in the world. She has auburn hair and gray eyes. Her complexion is so fair one can scarcely believe it to be true. I've been there every night since. She declines to answer my letters!"

He turned his haggard eyes on Miquette, who ministered to him. Her effect appeared to be marvelously soothing.

"And you want to forget her, of course," said Helen briskly. "Well, Mr. Creagh, I counsel work. Throw yourself into this special job of yours. Merit the confidence of your C. O. Put her entirely out of your thoughts. Endeavor——"

The visitor raised a deprecating hand.

"Forgive me—I want to do nothing of the sort. I want to be introduced to her. I hoped you—that is—if you could——"

He gazed into Helen's eyes with that melting look which had carried him straight to the hearts of all the more celebrated bar ladies in our great metropolis.

Helen looked at him so that cold water which was not there began to trickle down his spine.

"Am I an introduction bureau, or a matrimonial agency, or am I not?" she

inquired icily. "Do I look the sort of person who would force you on a girl who doesn't want to know you? Is there some hidden attraction about you, Mr. Creagh, which, when revealed, might excuse such an attempt on my part? Kindly explain yourself."

Mr. Creagh, now far more baby than gunner, wilted where he sat. The pomegranates that blossom in the gardens of Tyre are not so red as his face. He became simple, incoherent, natural.

"Well, but it isn't wrong to admire a girl, is it? Lots of people do it. And I do really love her. It isn't just a glad-eye stunt. I—I feel as if I could do something if she would let me love her. I came to you because I want to be happy, and besides——" He pointed gravely to the motto on his badge—"*Ubique quo Fas et Gloria Ducunt.*" "I think that includes you, doesn't it?"

He smiled his infant smile, and Helen had a woman's weakness for children. A dimple began to peep out on either side of her adorable mouth.

"Well, I'll think about it. Ring me up to-morrow morning at ten, please, at my flat—7007 South. It would help, rather, if you were to tell me the lady's name."

"Bertie," he crooned. "Bertie Savernare."

"Right-o. Good afternoon, Mr. Creagh."

Helen leaned back in her chair and thought.

"Frankie alone can help me. He knows everybody. But I do not want to ask him. Frankie has dropped me like a hot cinder for a fortnight. Of course it may be tact. And then there's his red-haired pal, who sounds very like Bertie. And s'posing he were to say he's too busy to help? Don't think he would, as he's not small-minded. But I hate asking. Oh, well!"

She picked up the telephone receiver and then paused.

"He shall come to tea," she mur-

mured. "I want to see his face when I ask about a red-haired girl." And Helen, who had a touch of wickedness in her, grinned evilly.

"You're in a tight corner and you want me to help?" came his quiet voice over the wire. "Fank you, Helen, I like helping. Can I come to tea? I have a blanked girl coming to tea, curse her!"

"Yes?" said Helen.

"But I'll put her off. I still have fever left. People who've lived in the tropics can always have fever."

"Ah!" said Helen.

"In half an hour, then. Good-by!"

And Miss Savernare, beautifully gowned for the occasion, learned with grief that her cavalier's temperature, in the region of one hundred and two degrees, prevented his receiving her.

"Frankie," began Helen, when he sat before her, sallow, yet faintly attractive, "I want to know about a red-haired girl, with a very fair complexion, appearing at the Georgette Theater. Her name is Bertie Savernare."

His calm blue eyes met her brown ones unwinking. Not a flicker of emotion ruffled his countenance.

"I've heard of her. She was coming to tea this afternoon. I put her off for you, Helen."

It is this kind of strategy that wins great battles.

"There is a young child, a gunner, who loves her. He came to me and at first I strafed him, but he's so little and young I took pity on him."

"That was a mistake. No man is little and young really. They are all ravishers from babyhood, except me. I am too foolish."

"Can you help me to bring them together?"

"I can, but what good will it do? Is he rich? Has he nine Rolls-Royces awaiting the day when petrol again flows like water? Is he the son of a duke? Are there family diamonds?"

"I don't know."

He sighed.

"Do you realize that Bertie is one of the prettiest girls in London, and that mere men in trousers are hers in shoals for the asking? She simply can't afford to throw herself away on him, in spite of his corps pay. Really, Helen!"

"But she runs about with you, Frankie. Miquette told me so."

"Miquette needs the correction of the birch. But even I am better than him. I have a little fame, or notoriety. I can promise the advertisement of her face in the piccy papers. Moreover, she knows I know my place, same as you do, Helen."

"Can't you do anything, Frankie?" She caressed him with her eyes, being shameless and unscrupulous, as are all nice girls.

"Bring him to tea at my rooms to-morrow. I'll get Bertie. Don't blame me if it's a wash-out though, will you? I'm only human."

"But rather a dear," cooed Helen, having got her own way. "Would you like to take me home and dine with me, Frankie? You may, if you like."

"If I may change on the way, and you will wear the gold frock. I love it. Fank you, Helen dear. The donkey will be delighted to have his nice carrot!"

"You beast!" she said, and they both laughed happily, being friends.

III.

"Good afternoon!" exclaimed Bertie in one of those metallic, clear voices, soothing as smitten tin cans, affected by beautiful chorus girls.

She rose from a large cushion on the floor, suspiciously near Frankie's chair, and the silk of her stockings flashed like forked lightning over a stricken field. Her clothes were charming in that accentuated fashion

of the stage, and strange gauds clinked about her. She made Helen feel dowdy, and Helen knew herself perfectly dressed. She seemed to have achieved and forgotten splendid, reckless sins, and at the same time exhibited a preternatural innocence.

Frankie presented his guests to one another. Mr. Creagh dithered with shyness and awe. After one glance Bertie took no further notice of him. She monopolized Frankie, with a touch of open challenge to Helen.

"This poor boy's so seedy. He simply can't do anything. Sit in that chair, Frankie, and let me look after every one. Sugar, Miss Vereker? Hand round that food, please, Mr. — will you? No, Frankie, I'll bring you your tea."

A solemn wink at Helen. Mr. Creagh's poor heart fell still further. He felt very nearly sick with disappointment.

Helen took her cup from his unhappy hand. He left her to bring his divinity bread and butter.

"Thanks!" drawled the lady absently. "Have you seen our show, Miss Vereker? You ought to get this boy to bring you. Some show, believe me!"

"I'd love to," said Helen politely. "Are you very ill, Frankie?"

"Dreadful!" sighed the martyr. "I believe I shall be worse before I'm better. Bertie's a positive angel to me, though. Creagh, old thing, pass round those cigarettes, will you?"

He saw Helen, on the excuse of borrowing a match, cross to the side of Bertie, sit on the back of a sofa, and swing her legs in a friendly manner.

"I do love your frock," she began in honeyed accents. "I s'pose your dress-maker's a secret. You stage people always have such wonderful things. My woman's a perfect fool. Look at this sleeve, for instance!"

Bertie, the less acute brain of the two, fell.

"Of course we have to know how to dress," she said. "It's our job. Now if you were to——"

Frankie, taking the unhappy Creagh to his bosom, caressed him.

"My dear old chap," he said. "I can see how you're feeling. Leave it all to me. Wait a second."

He broke in on a flow of blouses, gussets, and gored seams.

"Bertie, would you mind taking Helen to wash the jam off her face? I only ask you to care for our guest."

"Right-o!" assented the hostess. "Come on, and then I can show you how——"

She cast a look at the two young men and bore Helen away. Frankie turned swiftly to Mr. Creagh.

"Listen," he said. "This is a plot on my behalf. I don't care for Bertie; I do care for Helen. If you'll help me, we can both benefit. We must all have supper together. Then, on the way home, you'll get in my taxi and I'll get in yours, and we'll each have a chance for a word alone with these girls. Do you see the idea?" He smote Mr. Creagh on the shoulder with an enthusiasm he was far from feeling. "Great, isn't it?"

"Splendid," replied Mr. Creagh lugubriously. His nerve seemed to have gone. "When can you work it?"

The two damsels came back into the sitting room, and Frankie, noticing their linked arms, offered silent homage to Helen.

And when he asked quietly, "Can't we all sup together some time soon," "Well," bargained Bertie, "to-morrow I'm booked up with you, Frankie, and the next night my bird man's taking me out, and there's a rag on somewhere the night after, but Friday would do. What about Friday?"

"Yes, Friday suits me," murmured Helen.

"I can come," confessed Mr. Creagh. "All right, then. We all three go to

the Georgette Theater on Friday and have supper at the Restaurant d'Or after. I'll go round and see what time you can get away that night, Bertie."

Helen and Mr. Creagh took their leave. Bertie lingered. Mr. Creagh, having been refused the privilege of giving Helen dinner, begged to walk across the park with her to her flat in Queen Anne's Gate.

"What hopes?" he groaned after a long silence.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, they seem to an extent friendly, don't they?" he elaborated with some sarcasm.

"I s'pose they do," agreed Helen, and a little frown creased her brow. It was still there when, at her front door, she finally shook off Mr. Creagh.

IV.

On the fatal Friday, Helen had Frankie and Mr. Creagh to dine with her at the Lesbian Club. She ransacked the cellars of that institution for vintage and began proceedings with four so-called cocktails, but even these hardly steadied the leaping pulse of Mr. Creagh. When she pointed out to him world-wide celebrities—Dora Biggs, the female Dickens of our day; Lisette Cattermole, whose tunes have used up five hundred square miles of vulcanite in gramophone records—he only said, "Indeed?" or "Really?" Then Frankie became soulful, and quoted poets of whom no one but him had ever heard, to the disgust of everybody.

Later, in their box at the Georgette Theater, Mr. Creagh revived. Leaving Helen entirely to Frankie, he leaned his chin on his hands and waited, waited. When at last the orchestra broke into "Won't You Give a Sugar Stick to Baby?" and Bertie and five other rose-buds came on dressed as little girls, were all kissed by a handsome young gentleman, and each consumed a real

sugar stick, his eyes glowed with love. He followed her rapturously through nine changes of raiment and six concerted numbers, and never flagged.

After a season they supped, Bertie adorable with those touches of make-up that might tempt the gods. It was her hour, her kingdom, and her crown. Helen watched fascinated. Mr. Creagh groveled at her feet.

When they had come to the end of a perfect day, lo, two taxis and the enshrinement of one girl in each. By some confusion of detail, Frankie found himself with Helen, Mr. Creagh with his goddess.

"Well, I never!" ejaculated Frankie. "Surely Creagh was to have seen you home? We must have made a mistake. How foolish of us!"

"You're an idiot," she said with sudden crossness. "I don't want to drive back with you a bit. I think I'm tired of you to-night, and this has been a very silly business altogether. I s'pose that child will kiss her, and it'll be my fault. Men are brutes!"

"It is possible he may," observed her companion dryly, "but it will be entirely her own affair. I believe she was once kissed before—only a little one. And, anyway, he's a baby compared to her. She could crush him even as one crushes a *mdudu*, which is Swalili for an insect."

"You're perfectly horrid to-night, Frankie. I think you'd better not come and see me for quite a long time. If you do, we shall only quarrel. Do you understand?"

"No, Helen, but I'll be quite good and do as I'm told. Then you'll let me know when I'm forgiven?"

The taxi drew up at her hall door. Wise in the ways of women, he noticed the tired shadows under her eyes, the drooping mouth, the signs of weariness, and felt very sorry. He knew she did not mean to be unkind.

"Good night, Helen dear," he said at the gate of the lift. "Have lots of sleep and be very rested. I have tried to be wise, please."

V.

"Madame is out of town, m'sieur," cooed Miquette to Frankie, in the pink-and-gray Bond Street reception room. "She is beside the sea. I am not to say where. I do not forward letters."

"And why are you not allowed to say where, Miquette? I am a very old friend of Miss Vereker's. It's rather important."

Miquette studied him thoughtfully. She was at a romantic age, and she liked him.

"Well, m'sieur, the address is in the top right-hand drawer of the bureau, but you will not say I told you?"

"No," laughed Frankie, making a dash for the drawer, "but I'll send you a box of chocolates with my love, Miquette."

"Lea Cottage, Greysands, Sussex," he read. "Give me a Bradshaw please, pretty lady."

And six hours later, at the hour of five p. m., he was engaging a room at the Palace Hotel, Greysands, the population of which place is fifteen thousand.

But in Lea Cottage, there he found no Helen. She had gone for a walk along the cliffs.

On that June night, with the indolent moon bathing a wonder world in white light, he came upon her sitting on a ledge of rock, her face wet with tears. She started slightly, and then continued to gaze out to sea.

"I told you not to bother me for a long time," she said in rather a weary little voice. "I want to be alone, and not bothered."

He dropped beside her on the ledge and gathered her to him so that her head rested on his shoulder. She made

no resistance, but two more tears trickled down her cheeks. It was a very forlorn little face.

"Poor little Helen!" he murmured, and kissed the sad eyes and the quivering mouth. "I can't help it. I've got to take care of you, because I love you so much."

She sighed.

"I s'pose you must love me, for it doesn't seem to make any difference if I'm cross or a cry-baby or tired. You're always there to help me. You're a faithful old thing, Frankie, but I know you think me a little fool because I say everybody's good. You can't marry a little fool."

He stroked the dark head very gently.

"I know you're good, and I can be good with you and good to you. What more do you want? Besides, I love you."

"What about Bertie?" she queried. "And that boy? Don't you prefer Bertie? She's awfully pretty."

"Exactly," said Frankie acidly. "What about them? They are nothing on a plate. Bertie turned him down, of course, but that has nothing to do with us. You're awfully pretty, too. And what have I done that you should cast Bertie in my teeth? After all, there have been millions of Berties, but only one you."

"If you will go on taking care of me and loving me, and not bothering me when I'm cross, and not wanting to order me about, and not throw things across the room if I fuss over you when you're seedy, I think perhaps, Frankie, I might close down the business and come and take care of you. Would you like it very much?"

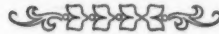
He kissed her very gently, and she took his face between her two hands and looked at him gravely and tenderly.

"Nice person," she said, "I do love you!"



The Silken Slip

By Beardsley Brent



WARREN MARVIN possessed one of those libertine natures that pique the interest of every woman inclined to be the least bit flirtatious. Women were fascinated by Warren and his little wanton ways, and many of those who were thus attracted afterward had things to regret. Others were warned by that queer sixth sense that women have, and flew away from his garden with no regrets and no singed wings, wondering to themselves why they flew. A few even ventured back into Warren's garden and joined the singed ones who couldn't fly away.

It was always the last woman that Warren loved best. He could no more be faithful to one woman than a peacock could change into a wren. His was the sort of nature that could never resign itself to domestic peace and happiness, and so he went through life seeking adventures in love—and always finding them. His cynical friends said that Warren was such a discriminating chooser in the garden of love that he made Don Juan look like a tyro.

At twenty-one, Warren had an affair with the prettiest girl in his home town that ended disastrously for the girl. Other affairs followed like footsteps, and then Warren, not being particularly popular with the best citizens, removed his handsome presence to New York, where, possessing an ingratiating personality and much social aplomb, he became a valued asset in a broker's office.

Warren liked New York because

New York didn't care what he did. Here were no prying neighbors to spy upon his doings and tell of them with shocked faces. A man could live his own life in his own way. And Warren did—in the way he liked best. The outcome of such living was that many pretty and well-dressed women in New York did either one of two things when they met Warren on Fifth Avenue—they either looked frightened or else smiled and blushed when he raised his hat. Usually, more of them blushed than looked frightened.

This was the state of affairs when Warren Marvin married—not because he wanted to, but because the head of the broker's firm, who took a paternal interest in Warren, desired him to settle down with a nice girl and be a respectable citizen. Warren knew a nice girl with a tidy bit of money in her own right, so he did her the honor of asking her to become Mrs. Marvin, which she did without undue urging. She was charming and good to look upon—and the last woman to come into his life at that particular time. Therefore, Warren loved her for a space. And she was quite mad about him.

The last last woman to come into Warren's life, that is, *protem.*, was unwittingly driven there by his wife. This one was an adorable blonde, fluffy and blue-eyed, who was playing in musical comedy. Warren had known her before he was married, for she was one of those moths that had flown away with

unsinged wings—something that Warren had always been reminiscently sorry about. She always made him think of a poem he had read somewhere:

Lads and lassies of every hue—
Gallants who linger a little yet,
You speak of the kisses that once you knew—
But what of the kisses you *didn't* get?

Warren met her on Fifth Avenue one day at the lunch hour, in front of one of the large department stores, and he promptly asked her to sit across the table from him once more—for the sake of old times. She accepted at once, and they had quite a gay little meal. Surely, if you had seen Warren sitting across the table from the blond young thing, you wouldn't have taken him for a married man at all, at all. He looked carefree and happy, and the glances that he bent upon the blond young thing were not the glances of a married man at all, at all.

"Well, you blue-eyed vampire, how goes the world with you?" he asked meaningly.

"The same as always," she replied, with a challenging flash from her blue eyes. "But I do like you as much as ever, Freddy."

She had always called him "Freddy" in the old days. And as she pronounced the name now, there was a lingering tenderness in her tone quite at variance with her seeming indifference.

"Well, I promise not to harm you, little girl," he bantered, "but if you ever get lonesome, call me up some time."

Several days later, she did call him up at his office and accepted a second invitation to lunch. The ice was thawing perceptibly at the second luncheon, and she told him all about her struggles and how hard it was for a girl to succeed on the stage in New York without—well, without being imprudent. He was sympathetic and interested, and she was plainly grateful for his sympathy. But Warren really had no intention of fishing in this newest pond.

He still had enough decency in his make-up to respect the woman who played the game straight.

But that night he idly told his wife about the pretty young thing who was having such a hard struggle for success, and suggested that Mrs. Marvin invite her to dinner some time. But Mrs. Marvin did not receive the suggestion complaisantly. In fact, she was so plainly jealous that Marvin shrugged away the subject with nonchalant shoulders.

But this unexpected opposition on the part of his wife fanned an innocent little flame into a conflagration. The very next day he invited the girl to lunch again and grew quite excited over her. When his wife left town the following week, on a visit to a college chum in Philadelphia, Warren pursued his new adventure with such ardor that the quarry capitulated. They ate in quaint restaurants together—from "Polly's" to the Palisades—and visited gay cabarets that beckoned with audacious inducements. They had a wonderful ten days together, and, for the first time in his chameleonlike existence, Warren found himself quite mad about *one* female person.

The day his wife came home, Warren had bought Annette—yes, her name was Annette—one of those expensive bits of limp and fragrant undergarments known as a silk chemise. The purchase had been made impulsively while passing the department store in which they had first lunched together, and he decided to present it to Annette personally, anticipating her childlike pleasure over the gift. He tucked it carefully in his pocket, with pleasant anticipations of the approaching evening.

But when he went home to dress, he met Martin Harmon at the entrance of the apartment house.

"Don't tell her that I told you," said Harmon with the air of a man who is the bearer of a great secret, "but your

wife is home. She wanted to surprise you."

"She's done that all right," replied Warren gloomily.

Now the Harntons' apartment adjoined the Marvins', and the windows of their apartments faced across an air shaft. The Harmons were the doting parents of a little girl some six months old and were quite as mad about her as Warren was over the "blue-eyed vampire." Martin Harmon was a wholesome sort of man who liked ice cream in his soda rather than brandy. His home, his wife, his youngster—they formed his trinity in life, and, knowing nothing of the "blue-eyed vampire," he took Warren at face value and suspected nothing.

Harmon, after informing Warren of the surprise awaiting him, went amiably on his way, leaving a rather perturbed man behind. Now the Marvin apartment was on the second floor, and Warren rarely used the elevator when he was in a hurry. On this night he walked slowly up the stairs, wondering sullenly what course to pursue regarding the guilty package that bulged from his pocket like a crime. It was almost certain to be discovered, for his wife was the sort of woman that plays valet to the man she loves. Of course he could explain that he had bought the silk chemise for her, but he knew she would not accept this explanation. He had never personally bought her any wearing apparel since their marriage. Then, too, her home-coming had been a surprise.

Meditating over these things, Warren slowly mounted the stairs and stopped abruptly when he reached the first landing, almost stumbling over an object in the dimly lighted hall. With a mumbled curse, he stooped to nurse a bruised shin—then turned to the object against which he had stumbled. It was a perambulator—the Harmon perambulator—standing innocently outside

the door of this circumspect couple's apartment. And it was empty. Warren looked about furtively. An idea was dawning in his mind. Why not hide the silk chemise in the baby's perambulator? He knew the Harmon baby would not be taken for its airing before ten o'clock the next morning, and at nine-thirty Warren would kiss his young wife good-by, rescue the silk chemise from its temporary haven—and all would be well.

It seemed the most practical way out of the difficulty. Warren quickly removed the package from his pocket, deftly slipped it beneath the diminutive pillow that usually sheltered the head of the Harmon wonder, and, with a sigh of relief, made for the door of his own apartment.

During dinner, his wife interrupted her flow of affectionate endearments, peering at him anxiously.

"I hope you are not going to have that nasty old 'flu,'" she said solicitously. "You don't look well, dear."

"Oh, I'm all right," he said lightly. "Just a bit tired, that's all. Had a strenuous day at the office."

She was reassured, but later, when he opened the door and peered out into the hall in the direction of the Harmon apartment, she became anxious again.

"The Harmons have gone out to dinner to-night," she said.

"Thought we might have had a little game of bridge," he muttered, and closed the door.

The next morning Warren ate his breakfast, which was usually a leisurely affair, in a feverish hurry, explaining to his hovering wife that he had a very important business deal on. After he had kissed her good-by and the door was softly closed behind him, he went quickly toward the spot where the Harmon perambulator had stood the night before. It was gone! Horrified, he searched the hall, but in vain. Endeavoring to shrug away his anxiety, he

passed down the stairs and made his way to the office. Usually he wouldn't have given the affair of the silk chemise another thought, but to-day his mind kept reverting to the incident again and again, and he had the foreboding feeling that haunts human beings when fate is lurking around the corner.

That evening he found his wife agitated and excited. She could scarcely wait for him to close the door before she made it plain to him why he had been troubled with that foreboding feeling all day. Of course it was the silk chemise! Esther Harmon, mother of the Harmon wonder, had found the guilty garment in the innocent conveyance of that adorable infant. There had been charges, denials, recriminations, attempted explanations, and tears, culminating in Esther's announcement that she would no longer live with a man of loose morals. Even as he listened to his wife's recital of the sordid tale, the voice of outraged virtue penetrated their apartment through a window opening upon the air shaft:

"I wouldn't believe you on the witness stand, Martin Harmon! I never wore a silk chemise in my life! No self-respecting woman would! You bought that for some—some——"

Then the window was closed with a bang, and Warren whistled softly. This was worse than he had expected!

Later that night, driven by a persistent restlessness, Warren left the house and wandered into the grillroom of a near-by hotel for liquid solace. This sequel to the silk chemise was not pleasant to dwell upon. He liked Harmon, who was a harmless, good-natured plodder. Whatever his relations might be with women, Warren was not a bad sort with men. Warren persons never are—as a rule.

Almost the first man he ran into was a gloriously intoxicated Harmon—a Harmon overcome by emotion and his

unaccustomed potations. At sight of Warren, he dragged him to a table, and there, over another unaccustomed glass, the tale of his marital unhappiness came tumbling forth.

"She won't believe anything I tell her, Esther won't," he said plaintively at the conclusion of his story. "And all on account of a silk chemise that I never saw in my life. A chemise in a baby buggy! Think of it, old man—a chemise in a baby buggy! Isn't it the most ridiculous thing in the world to have a row with your wife over? Darn-fool delivery boy made a mistake—that's all. Got in wrong apartment or something and put chemise in baby buggy. Can't explain—wife won't listen. Hell of a mess!"

"You'd better go home, old man," said Warren sympathetically, but the suggestion only called for another half-drunken outburst.

"No home to go to," he said with tears of self-pity in his eyes. "Got no home. Esther turned me out like a tramp. Won't have me in the same house with her. I'm staying here to-night. And all over a silk chemise that I know nothing about, never saw before in my life, and never want to see again!"

When he had finally seen the befuddled Harmon safely to his room, Warren went home in a very thoughtful mood. His first impulse was to go to Mrs. Harmon and tell her that she was the victim of an absurd error, taking all the blame upon himself. But he knew she wouldn't believe him. He and Martin had been friends of long standing and she would think he was merely trying to shield her husband. She was always expatiating upon the loyalty that men displayed toward one another, and he was sure that his action would, in her opinion, only be another instance of it. Besides, Mrs. Marvin was her chum and confidante; the danger of such a course was obvious. He would be

called upon for an explanation and there would be another disgusting family row. And all to no purpose! He would merely destroy the convenient naïveté of his own wife without helping Martin's case in the least. All the way home he pondered the problem without arriving at any solution.

The next day at the office, he still pondered and finally reached the decision that silence was the only course for him to pursue. He felt tremendously sorry for poor Martin, but the damage had been done and nothing could undo it. After all, the silk chemise *had* been found in the perambulator. No explanation could destroy that tangible evidence.

When he went home that evening, his wife met him with a tragic face.

"It is all over between Martin and Esther," she said solemnly.

"All over! What do you mean?" he asked nervously.

"Esther has taken the baby and gone to her mother. She says she will never live with Martin again."

A brief silence followed her words.

"I—I am terribly sorry for Martin," stammered Warren.

His wife looked at him in surprise.

"Sorry for Martin?" she said harshly.

"I am not the least bit sorry for him! He is a libertine—a—a promiscuous lover—a man who has wrecked his home for the sake of a bad woman!"

"But, my dear——" protested Warren.

"You don't understand, Warren," said his wife tenderly, "because you are so good and noble. But a man who would hide a—a silk chemise in his own baby's perambulator is—is"—she groped helplessly for words—"well, he's unmentionable; that's all."

"Still, I am sure if we heard the whole story——" began Warren.

"I wouldn't want to hear it," interrupted Mrs. Marvin. "It would be too terrible."

Then she suddenly threw her arms around his neck and kissed him.

"Oh, Warren," she said, "I am so glad that *you* are not that sort of man!"

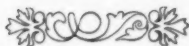


SONNET

DEAREST, an thou wouldst see a sorry sight,
Come to the garden where Love crucified—
Poor Love, with bruised mouth, gray-faced, wan-eyed—
Hangs for the world to know his dreadful plight.
Lady, thou askest what hath bound Love's might?
Only the selfishness, the pomp, the pride
Of those who prostitute and Love deride—
Sweet Love, once gay, in purple flowers bedight.
Look! There the gyve hath cut his slender wrists.
See the brow dewed by agonizing mists.
What must we do to ease this hurt and pain?
Ah, one true lover's kiss upon the lips,
That the drear burden from his shoulders slips—
There, heart-o-me, Love is himself again!

WILLIAM VAN WYCK.

The Tired Old House



By Nina Wilcox Putnam

Author of "The Lamb of God,"

"A Harness for the Muse," etc.

THE Ascension lilies called me in; otherwise I might not have ventured, for the garden was riotous, and behind the shutters some pale flame of life might yet be flickering. What if a trembling figure came to the door and called me intruder? It is a tragedy to desecrate the extreme privacy of an ancient homestead, the more so if the householder be feeble. In such old people the sense of ownership is so strong that, if one be not welcome, one is driven forth by their antagonism as by a flaming sword.

But the Ascension lilies called me and I entered through the sagging picket gate, the lilies brushing me with their fragrance as I passed. How gray it was—all gray with wind and weather, a hoary old house. Certainly it appeared to be deserted, but I approached it with reverent caution. One can never tell about so very ancient a house whose shutters are closed gently, like the eyes of age in sleep. It may only be resting through the heat of day, gathering strength to open its windows to the evening breeze, at the touch of some wrinkled hand.

I stepped upon the moss-grown porch and lifted the knocker. It fell with a hollow noise that stirred a ghostly echo,

and by the sound I knew that only memories dwelt there. I opened a shutter and peered in through square panes of glass, each iridescent like an opal. But from the outside I could see little.

The lilies grew thickly. I trod upon them, and they sent forth a bitter odor like oil of roses. There had been a path of rounded yellow pebbles leading along the south wall, and I followed it, walking among the wind-planted flowers from a forgotten garden. Then, turning a corner, I came upon a low door, painted green. There was a passion vine on either side, clustering, somber of blossoms, a tangled lacework of ancient stems. Across the door a single strand had grown, and the flowers hung heavily upon it. I put my hand on the door, and it opened at my gentle pressure. A swallow darted out from eaves above it. I entered, breaking the passion vine.

Dust over the window like a veil, dust upon the empty hearth. A spider clambered across her web to a secret recess where once the kettle had hung above a blazing fire! O host of departed housewives who once made this your realm, know ye now the futility of human endeavor? Have your poor, knotted hands, hardened by toil, softened to pluck from celestial harp

strings such songs as you sang of over your work or in your crimson-cushioned pews of a Sabbath? The spider has woven a greater miracle than your burnishing; you have driven her forth, yet you are gone and she survives, flinging her gray banner triumphantly upon the very altar of your stronghold!

Here had been prepared the food that fed the hunters of two centuries ago, made by grim mothers of Puritans and the prim mothers of them who walked in terror of the God they had themselves created. And here had been fed the treacherous mouth of the savage who sat upon the doorsill and took the rolled sconces from the hands of the goody. And here, too, was served the food, carefully doled, to the husbands who bought their country with their blood. Upon the flat staples driven deeply above the mantleshef had hung the musket which was snatched down when horses were left standing in the half-plowed field. And here was cooked food for ministers with smug, thin lips who knew not what they preached. And food, too, for strong laborers who had brown throats and heavy hands, and who sat down at table with their masters.

And the women? They did not sit, but waited upon the others. Thin women for the most part, they, with meager bosoms and sharp tongues, or meek girls, with pale faces and wistful eyes; submissive, but as yet unconquered by the routine of life, and always hoping. Why should not a house be weary which had borne the secret of their deferred hopes?

Who has danced in this parlor? Nay, who has sewn sedately or sat with a quaint book, of a rare and quiet hour? Who has lain stiff and cold, seeing not the crowd of mourners, hearing not the preacher's voice?

There came a whisper which ran before me, fluttering around the walls:

"There was laughter here at Christmas; there were children here in spring-time."

Yes, old house, I know. And they were conceived in your heart and brought forth in a travail that your walls have echoed. You have grown old in seeing all of life for many generations.

There was once a marble-topped stand here in the hall, and above it a row of china pegs. Below it have stood pattens, and then goloshes, and then overshoes. Curious to think of—is it not?—but there are generations even in footwear!

Up the stairs feet of many ages have pattered, and the same feet at many ages.

Four great chambers up above. Shall I wring from you the mysteries of your nights? Ah, yes, but not to put into words; only to wrap into my heart and sigh about! Whether of grief, of sickness, of terror or delight, of fear or of love, you are too sacred for speech or written word. And this is the more true because of the repression which the actors in your dreams esteemed.

I walked about the chambers yearningly, touching the faded woodwork with caressing hands, leaning my cheek against walls that were musty, poignant with an odor that was like memories, dim and ancient, and scarce tangible, running my fingers over the great, rough beams that patient hands, long dead, had hewn, great beams that now could hardly bear their burden, but were like a strong man, past his prime, valiantly doing duty still.

"O you who have dwelt here," I cried, "come! I know you well. No need to name your names, for you have lived and I have lived and therefore we are kin!"

Of all those who passed through its doors, who had gone last from this house that was so weary? Had its chil-

dren gone one by one? That is the way of death. Or had the last deserted, leaving the house while he could walk alone? No, I think not the last. The place had a certain air that spoke of lingering, an aroma of some affection that only death was strong enough to sever.

Was it a man who bore alone the weight of memories in that house? And did he sit with books at night, and glowing embers on the hearth, when all the lily beds were banked with snow? Through long, warm mornings did he potter in and out among the flowers whose great-grandchildren flourish among the yellow pebbles of the path? And did he fasten up the strands of that great passion vine, with trembling, aged hands, year on year, until those hands were laid at rest? Who folded them upon his breast?

Or was the last one there a maid, grown old in singleness, alone, wait-

ing, perhaps, for love that never came? What simple tastes served to fill the lonely hours? Was it making quilts of wonderful design—sturdy rugs—sweetmeats from a secret family recipe? Here on the window sill, this mark—was it not made by laying down a book, a Bible laid so as to catch the fast-fading light? Or had her elbows rested there as she dreamed, looking into the moon-filled night? Did she pluck the Ascension lilies in full flower, so that their perfume filled the quiet rooms? Or did she lay them on the bosom of a grave? And did she pluck the blossoms from that vine beside the kitchen door?

The Ascension lilies were overwhelmingly sweet. I stepped out into the sunlight and closed the little green door behind me softly. On either hand the broken strand of the passion vine hung down with withered leaf.

Requiescat in pace.



REGRET

SO many happy things we missed,
Our loving time was all too brief!
It was gray winter when we kissed;
We never saw the elm in leaf!

I grieve for what we never knew
As well as what we knew in vain—
I never laughed and walked with you
Through bright, pelting summer rain!

And I have found gay flowers since,
We had no chance to find together—
Wild orchard lands of plum and quince.
Alas, we loved in wintry weather!

MUNA LEE.

Ainslee's Book of the Month

CLAIRE, by Leslie Burton Blades; George H. Doran Company, New York.

FIRST of all, this is a corking adventure story. It is melodrama, but good melodrama. A shipwreck occurs in the first chapter. The hero, Lawrence, a blind man, makes a wild stretch of the Chilean seacoast after great hardships and a considerable measure of luck. He feels his way along the sand and discovers the woman, Claire, who is lying insensible, with a broken ankle. They are the sole survivors. When she recovers consciousness, they enter upon a strange partnership. He will carry her toward civilization, and she will furnish the eyes to guide him away from obstructions in the path. With her on his shoulders, he staggers up into the Andes mountain range.

They have manifold adventures and, of course, a love motive begins to develop. The incredible proposition of their getting through unaided is avoided by their coming upon the cabin of a sort of intellectual hermit, a Spaniard named Phillip. He tells them that the passes will soon be choked with snow and offers them hospitality until the weather breaks in the spring. Phillip proceeds to fall in love with Claire, thus providing the inevitable triangle. The climax is a primitive life-and-death battle between Lawrence and the Spaniard.

So much for the plot. The book, however, owes its value chiefly to the author's masterly delineation of the blind hero. How does a man so afflicted face life? Can he cultivate

enough courage and optimism to give him an even show with his fellows? Is it possible for him to win the love of a normal woman? These questions are answered convincingly. Lawrence is portrayed as a strong and admirable character, as an artist and thinker, above all as a lover whom we can imagine Claire preferring to the austere Phillip.

The reviewer makes the following comment with a degree of hesitation. Leslie Burton Blades, who wrote the book, puts into the mouth of Lawrence a hundred bitter protests against the refusal of society to judge a blind man's work on its own merits. He resents the opinion that such and such an achievement is remarkable "for a blind man." Yet "Claire" gains immeasurably in interest when one knows that Leslie Burton Blades is himself totally blind. True, it is good enough as a story to compete with the work of other authors. But with the above fact in mind, one takes more seriously the analysis of Lawrence's personal reactions. One notes with special attention the descriptive passages, revealing as they do astonishing powers of correct visualization of the natural world. Mr. Blades' publishers will do him no harm by advertising that he is sightless.

"Claire" is a brutal tale in some respects. The final scene is little short of horrifying. The literary style suggests that of Jack London. Both Lawrence and Claire might have been created by the author of "Martin Eden." The character of Phillip is the only one that is a bit nebulous. W. A. R.



In Broadway Playhouses

By Edwin Carty Ranck

Thrills and Summer Fluff

BROADWAY managers are predicting that the new season, which is now in full blast, is going to be the busiest and most lucrative in the history of the American stage. They base these predictions on sound common sense. The long haggle over the peace terms, and the uncertainty of what might follow in the event that Germany did not sign, had its effect upon the theaters as well as in other lines of business. Men and women were worried and perturbed; they were not in the theatergoing mood. But now this is all ancient history; the bulk of our men are back from Europe, and New York seems to have become the amusement Mecca of the world. The transient population at the present time is unprecedented—and these “floaters” must be amused. Therefore, the managers were never so happy over the outlook, nor were actors ever before so sure of employment, the Actors’ Equity and the League of Nations notwithstanding.

This rush of amusement seekers and liberal spenders to New York has already resulted in one shattered precedent, to which I have called attention before—the establishment of a permanent summer season that is a sort of prologue to the fall season. I don’t mean a sum-

mer season of light musical shows, but a season for the trying out of serious plays that will, the manager hopes, survive the heated months. This setting forward of the theatrical clock, so to speak, now seems destined to be as permanent as the Daylight Saving Law.

Last season A. H. Woods was considered a rather bold Columbus of the footlights when he produced “Friendly Enemies” in July, but William A. Brady has gone him one better by producing “At 9:45,” a thrilling melodrama by that well-known theatrical syndicate, Owen Davis, on June 28th. Nevertheless, this play already seems an assured success, and I venture to prophesy that it will run long into the winter.

“At 9:45” is one of those “Button! Button! Who’s Got the Button?” crime plays that have become so familiar since Bayard Veiller wrote “The Thirteenth Chair.” The formula is to have some unsympathetic character that no one likes murdered in the first act and then fasten suspicion on every one in the cast, thus keeping the audience guessing until the finger of guilt points in the direction of the one person that no one had suspected.

However, “At 9:45” kept me intensely interested until the final fall of the curtain, although, by a process of

elimination, I detected the real criminal early in the second act.

There are two remarkably fine bits of acting in this play. John Cromwell as *Captain Dixon*, a shrewd and unconventional detective with a sense of humor, was particularly effective. Mr. Cromwell's acting was a revelation in the art of detail. He visualizes *Captain Dixon* first as a human being and then as a detective. He is one of the few detectives I have ever seen on the stage who might really be one. And John Harrington as *Tom Daly*, a chauffeur who is suspected of the crime, might have stepped straight from the car of a Broadway chauffeur. It was a most convincing portrait.

Frank Hatch's conception of *Doane*, the accused butler, was admirable for its suggestion of repressed emotion that finally bursts all barriers. The rest of the cast was fair.

This early production was very evidently due to Mr. Brady's desire to forestall George Broadhurst's production of "The Crimson Alibi," another crime play of the button brand that was produced on the evening of July 17th when the mercury was flirting with the high spots in the thermometer and the inside of a theater resembled the hot room in a Turkish bathhouse.

"The Crimson Alibi" is Mr. Broadhurst's dramatization of Octavus Roy Cohen's novel of the same name. Mr. Cohen is a young writer who has come to the fore within the past year, principally by reason of his stories of negro life in the South. But his novel was ingenious and exciting, and Mr. Broadhurst has conveyed these qualities to the stage in most effective fashion. I defy any one to leave the theater during the performance of this play, which is just one darned thrill after another. And the audience does not know who was the murderer until the final few minutes, owing to the ingenuity of Mr. Broadhurst's cumulative suspense.

Joshua Quincy, a hated rich man, is murdered by an unknown person armed with a dagger, and half a dozen possible murderers are suspected by the audience. There is also a suspected butler in this play, but he successfully rebuts the charge.

Harrison Hunter, as an amateur detective, kept the interest at high tension. He was greatly aided by William H. Thompson, a character actor of real distinction. The suspected butler in this play was admirably acted by George Graham. Bertha Mann, as the maid, took full advantage of her acting opportunities.

"The Crimson Alibi" is a thrilling and interesting play that absorbs your attention as a blotter absorbs ink. Here, by the way, is an excellent opportunity for the theatergoer to study the methods of two experts in drawing thrills from the human spine. Owen Davis is an old hand at this game and so is George Broadhurst. See "At 9:45" first and then "The Crimson Alibi" and try to figure out which playwright has outthrilled the other.

By the way, here is a suggestion for a dramatic thrill chaser: Have a butler kill a man in the first act in plain sight of the audience and then have him turn to the audience and say: "They will never convict me because I am a butler." Then have the suspicion fasten irrevocably upon the niece of the janitor's sister, but in the last act have the butler, who has grown weary of raised rents and the high cost of breathing, confess in weary tones that he killed the man to obtain a thrill himself. Of course, just as the police rush in, you could have the bored butler drink a glass of 2.75 beer and die in agony, thus saving the State the cost of an expensive trial. I insist that this would be timely as well as novel. Besides, I am tired of seeing so many of these stage butlers escape scot-free.

Last May I read a short story in a

magazine, entitled "Welcome Home," in which the hero was a returned soldier who fell in love with a soda-water clerk.

"Ha! Ha!" I cried at the time. "I will wager that the stage is flooded with these after-the-war stories next season!"

Well, without meaning to brag about it, I was right. The flood of war-after-math plays of the "Welcome Home" brand has already set in. The first one, "The Five Million," by Guy Bolton and Frank Mandel, is a conventional attempt to make capital out of the returned doughboy by bringing in every possible device that will make patriotism a paying proposition. There is a familiar pacifist villain; an old G. A. R. man who talks in a tremulous way about Civil War days; constant allusions to the American flag; and talk of conditions "over there" that will amuse doughboy audiences by reason of their inaccuracy.

"The Five Million" is the ancient "Enoch Arden" yarn dressed up in khaki. A gallant American aviator who was reported dead comes back to his home town to find his sweetheart engaged to marry a pacifist. Of course this pacifist is the double-dyed villain of the play and is made to eat crow in the end by the doughboy hero, aided by his G. A. R. uncle and a woman war-relief worker. Percy Helton, who was a real doughboy in active service, played a small part excellently. Purnell Pratt was effective as the pacifist, and Robert McWade was wasted in an uncongenial rôle. The remainder of the cast was undistinguished.

Reports from Los Angeles are to the effect that Oliver Morosco has just tried out another play of this ilk yclept "Civilian Clothes," by Thompson Buchanan, who has written some good things in the past. But, from all accounts of the try-out, he has failed to

distinguish himself in this overworked field of the returned soldier.

The public is promised more plays of this sort *ad nauseam*. Another one, called "Welcome Home," has been announced for production later in the season. Whether this is a dramatization of the magazine story by the same name I do not know. But I *do* know that if the managers keep on giving us this sort of thing, they will wear all the "welcome" out of the theatrical doormat. It is too soon after the war for plays of this sort to be broadly popular. That was proved after the Civil War. "Shenandoah," the first Civil War play to meet with success, was written more than twenty years after the great struggle ended, and the next one, "Secret Service," was not produced until 1896. And in 1919, as in 1865, distance lends enchantment.

With a big whoop and hurrah, the "Shubert Gaities of 1919" opened early in July and proved to be a real cyclone of fun, frolic, and frills. Ed Wynn, who is, in my estimation, one of the funniest comedians we have had on our stage in a decade, leads the hosts of fun makers over the top, planting the banner of success firmly upon the ramparts of popularity.

It is impossible to describe this musical potpourri, but I can truthfully state that it is a colorful and piquant entertainment, as variegated in fun and music as the crazy quilt that is made up of fair and fluffy young things in costumes conspicuous by their absence. Ed Wynn is funny every minute of the time, particularly in the "laugh drive" scene, where he calls for laugh subscriptions. On the opening night, when he declared that a laugh by Ziegfeld at a Shubert show would be worth a thousand laughs from any one else, he must have cornered every one of the thousand, for Florenz Ziegfeld was in the audience—and he laughed right out loud.

Ed Wynn is ably seconded in his fun campaign by William Kent, who is genuinely funny part of the time, and by George Hassell, who is screamingly funny all the time.

"The Greenwich Village Follies," after being postponed six times, finally went on view, and, for the second time in its history, this little playhouse has produced a popular success, the first time being "The Better 'Ole."

Bessie McCoy Davis, the original "Yama Yama" girl, is the featured entertainer, and she is quite fetching in some of her songs and dances. Her nearest rival to popular honors is Bobby Edwards, a real Greenwich Villager, who first attracted notice with his ukulele, when he was in the habit of dropping around at Village restaurants and singing a little song about the ladies. Those who want to see what a Greenwich Villager looks like at close range now have the opportunity of their lives.

This attraction is staged admirably and comes closer to being professional than any production since "The Better 'Ole." However, the Coburns produced the Bairsfather comedy, and the Coburns are not Villagers. Therefore, strictly speaking, "The Greenwich Village Follies" is the only popular attraction that has come from near-bohemia. Already there is talk of bringing it up-town.

Now that A. H. Woods, Gilbert Miller, Doris Keane, and Laurette Taylor are winning the plaudits and dollars of English audiences by their productions of American plays, William A. Brady, who has been trying vainly to beguile the bashful Mr. Shaw to our own shores, announces his intention of besieging London next season with three of his most successful productions—"Too Many Cooks," "Little Women," and "The Man Who Came Back." They will be presented with excellent casts. Verily, if you want to see any

of the old successes of yesterday, hop off to London some time and visit American theaters.

America is all the rage there nowadays. Not only are American plays monopolizing the theaters, but English playwrights are utilizing American material. For instance, the two most popular theatrical entertainments in London to-day are "Abraham Lincoln," a play by John Drinkwater, the English poet, based on the life of Lincoln, and "Monsieur Beaucaire," a musical version of Booth Tarkington's famous romance. The Tarkington story was immensely popular nearly twenty years ago. (Good Lord! How time flies!) Then it was made into a play, and Richard Mansfield was quite successful in it. Now an English composer has written music for it and the opera has scored heavily. Lucky Mr. Tarkington!

It is welcome news to the admirers of that eccentric comedian with the funny voice, James T. Powers, to learn that he is to reappear on the stage this fall in a musical version of the farce, "Somebody's Luggage," in which he was last seen in 1917. Powers is one of the six funniest men on the stage, the other five being Ed Wynn.

By the way, some one asked me the other day why I thought Ed Wynn was so funny. I replied that it was because Wynn looks so unlike the conventional stage funny man. He reminds me of a highbrow college student seeking a doctor's degree, and yet when he talks in that stuttering way of his, breaking ever and anon into a laugh of well-simulated embarrassment, the result is always irresistibly funny. Wynn is an intelligent entertainer who keeps up to date on current topics of the day. I have heard him get to the heart of some public question with a laugh that illuminated it like a searchlight. There is something more than mere horseplay in his fun. Some of Wynn's cleverest

stories are inventions of his own—and creative fun makers are rare on our stage.

Stuart Walker is making ambitious plans for next season. He has been at work for some time on his own dramatization of Booth Tarkington's "The Magnificent Ambersons," which will receive an early production on Broadway; and later on he will produce a three-act comedy by Booth Tarkington and Harry Leon Wilson entitled "The Gibson Upright." This play, which was recently published serially by a popular magazine, is concerned with the story of a piano manufacturer whose best seller is the Gibson Upright. This manufacturer, made desperate by continuous strikes and unjust demands, turns over his factory to the strikers and lets them run it—with disastrous results. It is a clever satire on labor conditions of to-day that should be interesting. But it is a moot question whether it will be very popular.

That same problem arises in connection with the play, "All the King's Horses," which the Coburns expect to produce in October. It is the work of Louis K. Anspacher, author of "The

Unchastened Woman," and treats of labor problems that have arisen during different epochs of American history. Like Arnold Bennett's "Milestones," it treats of three generations, and, while it is written with rare charm and distinction, I venture the prediction that it will fall far short of meeting with the success of "The Better 'Ole." Discussions on capital and labor have never been popular on the stage. As a matter of fact, they do not belong on the stage. The lecture platform seems to be the proper setting for such arguments.

However, my judgment about this may be altogether at fault. Nevertheless, I shall await the result of these two experiments in labor plays with a great deal of interest. If they *do* succeed, it will prove what many publicists have contended—that audiences to-day are more willing to accept serious discussions of vital problems on the stage than on the lecture platform. Should this prove true, we may yet witness the exit of the Tired Business Man and the entrance of the Intelligent Human Being—a consummation devoutly to be desired.



LOVE AT SIGHT

I MET my love in Gay Street,
 (I thought that love was done)
 In quiet little Gay Street,
 So timid of the sun.

She flamed against the dull bricks
 That never showed surprise;
 I met my love in Gay Street,
 And kissed her with my eyes!

F. NORMILE.

Talks With Ainslee's Readers

THE first installment of a new May Edginton serial will be our leading feature next month. It is entitled "The Way the Wind Blows," and deals with the adventures in love and the business world of an English girl who has seen service at the front. Her war experiences have made it impossible for her to accept the plan of her old-fashioned father to hurry her into an old-fashioned marriage. Rosa Loftus is a type of the woman that has come into being in Europe. She is wholly fascinating. Her creator, May Edginton, is probably the most popular of AINSLEE's authors. At our request, she has written the following letter to you:

I'M invited to tell you something about myself, and if it wasn't that AINSLEE's readers feel more like friends to me than strangers, I shouldn't know where to begin. I seem already to know so many of you through your letters to me. I want to know many more. That's one of the most wonderful and charming things about a writer's life—the friendships one makes right across continents, sometimes on the other side of the world. People ask one: 'Why did you begin to write?' My own answer is simple and unadorned: 'I had to earn my living.' I am one of a family of five, and when we were children, we lived in the country, possessed of delights like ponies, donkeys, rabbits, cats, dogs, and were really, absolutely, perfectly happy. That seems a wonderful thing to say. It is certainly a wonderful thing to look back upon—a riotously happy childhood. I came up

to London in the early twenties, with my first short-story check in my pocket, to brave the city on my own. After all, I hadn't to be very brave. I have no harrowing picture of hungry struggle to paint for you; I found editors the sweetest of men. Doors stood open. Magazine offices were enthralling places to adventure into. I worked like a nigger for success. I found in myself an unexpected business instinct—and there you are! The need for making money, I am sorry to say, is impressed upon me more imperatively than ever now by no less a person than my small son, aged four, who approached me with a request for pennies the other day. He had already been heavily financed, so I replied: 'Mummy hasn't any money.' 'Well, then,' he said imperiously, 'make more! Make more!'

DID you know that there are several tribes of pure-blooded gypsies in this country, who live the nomadic life and preserve the customs of their ancient race? Louise Rice, who has their confidence more fully than any other American, has written an enthralling series of gypsy stories called "Romany Hearts," publication of which will begin in November. There will also be a sheaf of splendid short stories, including "The Fighting Odds," by the blind author, Leslie Burton Blades; "The Lady and the Genius," by Joseph Bernard Rethy; "The End of a Perfect Jay," by Jessie E. Henderson and Henry J. Buxton; and "Innocents at Large," by Nancy Boyd.

"Among Those Present

at my coming-out party were four particularly delightful friends. So attractive and captivating that they won instant favor with all the guests. Who do you think they were?

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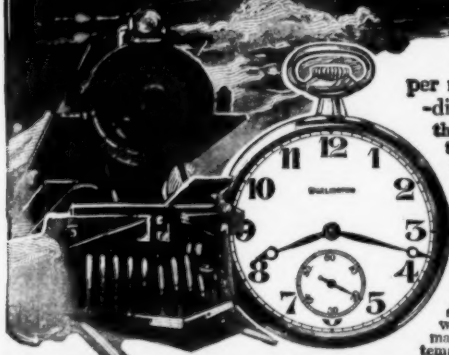
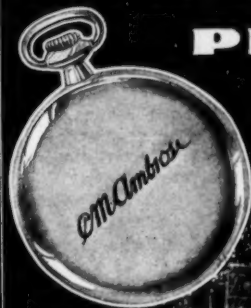
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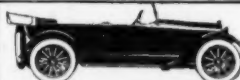
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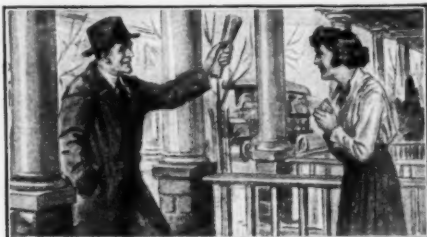
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It's soft and pliable—decreases in size as the tobacco is used—tobacco does not cake in the package—no digging it out with the finger. Keeps the tobacco in even better condition than tin. Now, don't you owe it to yourself to buy a package and give Tuxedo a trial? — Not quite as much tobacco as in the tin, but—

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**"Your
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The more it buys the harder it is to spend.

All of which is suggested by what a millionaire said to me the other day—as free a spender as I ever passed a hotel evening with:—

"Look here, Jim," he said, "I can't see that 50 cent size of Mennen's—it's too much coin to spend at one time for shaving cream."

"But it's a bigger tube," I protested, "you get more for your money than in the regular 35 cent size."

"I know," he answered, slipping half a dollar to the waiter, "but 35 cents is my price for shaving cream."

Ain't human nature wonderful?

In our fifty cent tube of Mennen's there's enough shaving cream to bring peace and the joy of living into a man's life every morning for many months—

Enough cream to soften the meanness out of two seasons' crops of stubble.

And a quality of shaving cream so fine, so unusual, so remarkable—

—say, have you ever tried Mennen Shaving Cream? Have you taken a half inch on a drenched brush and whipped it for three minutes into a creamy, firm, moist lather—with the brush only—using a lot of water, hot or cold—

—and then slipped the razor down the east facade of your jaw in the most deliciously glorious shave of your career?

You've got to know Mennen's to like it. Send me 12 cents and I'll mail a demonstrator tube. Try it! Then reason with yourself calmly if many months of such shaves aren't worth the price of two Perfectos.

Jim Henry

(Mennen Salesman)



10-19

**Jim Henry,
The Mennen
Company
Newark, N. J.**

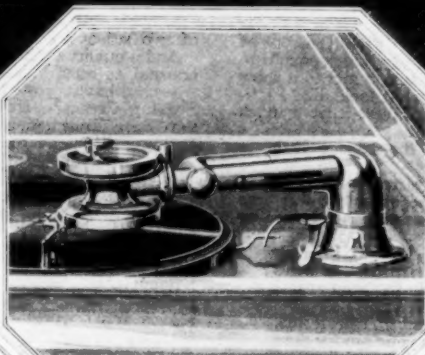
Send me the demonstrator tube.
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as good as you say—50 cents a tube
won't stop me.

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The Ultona

Achieving the Ultimate in Phonograph Music

By Means of Two Exclusive and Scientific Features

The Brunswick Method of Reproduction gained instant and wide-spread public favor because it enriches the tone qualities of all records. For this alone it is adored by artists and approved by the hypercritical. It embodies the true principles of tone reproduction and complies with the established laws of acoustics in projecting tone. Two revolutionary factors, among others essentially different from other phonographs, make this possible. They are the Ultona and the Tone Amplifier.

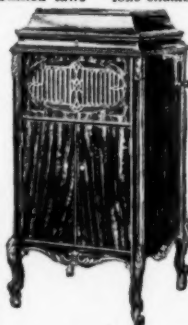
The Ultona Plays All Records

The Ultona—a product of creative genius—enables one to play all make records on the Brunswick. Not a combination contrivance nor complex mechanism, yet involving a fundamental principle of sound. By a slight turn of the hand it

supplies the proper needle, correct weight and precise diaphragm.

The Amplifier Enriches Tones

As the name implies it amplifies tone, making it truer and sweeter. It is a vibrant tone chamber like the sounding board of a fine piano or violin. Constructed entirely of moulded hollywood and free from metal it gives the requisite resiliency for unfolding and projecting true tone.



Ask to Hear The Brunswick

Any Brunswick dealer will be glad to demonstrate the many claims made for it. Choose your favorite record to be tested—the one that will help you judge best. Your verdict like that of unnumbered thousands will be "the one super phonograph."

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